

THE MASTERPIECES OF GEORGE SAND

# A ROLLING STONE

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THE MASTERPIECES OF GEORGE SAND

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A ROLLING STONE

TO MY FRIEND

*BERTON PÈRE*

## I

I was making an official visit, as inspector of finances, to the little town of Arvers in Auvergne, and had been quartered for two days at the *Grand Monarque Hotel*. What grand monarch? and why is that classic sign so common for public-houses in old-fashioned towns? Is it a tradition that has come down from the age of Louis XIV.? I have not the faintest idea, and I ask anybody who can to answer the question. The image representing that illustrious and mysterious personage has disappeared in almost every case. I recall having seen one sign on which he was pictured in a Turkish costume.

The hostess of the *Grand Monarque*, Madame Ouchafol, was an affable, well-disposed person, devoted to anybody or anything connected with the constituted authorities: nobility, ancient or modern, plebeian opulence, official position or local influence—all without prejudice to the consideration due to the petty functionaries and commercial travellers who constitute the regular clientage, the constant profit of a provincial inn. Moreover, Madame Ouchafol had religious sentiments, and held her own against the free-thinkers of her neighborhood.

One evening, as I was smoking my cigar on the balcony of the hotel, I noticed on the square, of which the church, the mayor's office and the hotel form three sides, a tall young man whose figure and bearing would have attracted attention anywhere. He had on his arm an exceedingly ugly peasant girl. Two fellows, slightly tipsy, evidently mechanics in their Sunday clothes, were following him, also accompanied by girls in high caps, who were, however, very pretty. Why had that comely youth, whose bourgeois caste did not lack style, and who did not seem to be the worse for liquor, chosen for his partner or his friend the ugliest and least showily-dressed damsel of them all?

This little problem would not have engaged my attention more than a minute, had not Madame Ouchafol, who was wiping the dust from the leaves of a consumptive orange-tree which stood on the balcony, taken pains to call my attention to it.

"You are looking at Handsome Laurence, aren't you?" she said, casting a most ironical and contemptuous glance at the light-hearted Antinous.

Answering my answer without waiting for it, she continued:

"He's a good-looking fellow—I don't say he isn't—but always in bad company! I agree that he's a peasant's son, but he has a rich uncle with a title; and, more than that, when a boy has a good education and wears the clothes of a gentleman, it isn't decent to go about drinking with Tom, Dick and Harry at village merry-makings, and especially to walk through the streets in broad daylight with such hussies as that on his arm! But that fellow is mad—he has no respect for anything; and the most surprising part of it is, monsieur, that he never has aught to say to a girl who might do him credit. He is always dallying with

perfect monsters, and not of the most austere sort, I beg you to believe!"

"I will believe whatever you choose, Madame Ouchafol; but how do you explain this strange taste?"

"I don't undertake to explain it! It is impossible to understand that poor child's behavior; for after all, monsieur, I do take an interest in him. His godmother was my friend when we were girls, and we often lamented together over his turning out so badly."

"Then he is a downright good-for-nothing, is he?"

"Ah! monsieur, if that was all! if he was only a bit of a rake and a libertine! if one could say: 'He is a little wild, he is having a good time, he's a harum-scarum fellow who will reform and settle down like so many others!' But no, monsieur. He drinks a little, but he doesn't get into debt; his morals aren't exactly bad. He isn't quarrelsome either, although on occasion, at village fêtes or the workmen's balls, when he sees a man down, he falls on the men who are beating him and gives them a good thrashing, so they say. In fact, he might amount to something, for he is neither foolish nor lazy; but, you see, my gentleman has ideas of his own—especially one idea which drives his relatives to despair!"

"You arouse my curiosity to know what that idea is."

"Let me tell you that instead of accepting a place in the customs or the telegraph service, or a tobacco shop, or something at the mayor's office, or the registry, or the clerk's office, for he has had them all offered to him, he prefers to live in the outskirts of the town with his father, who used to be a tenant farmer, and now owns a piece of land which he has turned into a nursery. Poor Père Laurence is an excellent, hard-working man, who has only this one child left, whom he undertook to bring up above his station, hoping that his own older brother, who is very rich, would take a liking to him and make him his heir. But not at all; the young man, who went to Normandie, where his rich uncle lives, after taking his degree, allowed himself to be led into a frightful scrape, monsieur, and he disappeared for two or three years, without letting anyone know what had become of him."

"What was the scrape, Madame Ouchafol?"

"Ah! monsieur, excuse me if I do not tell you, out of consideration for Père Laurence, who raises fruit trees along his walls, and has always kept me supplied with fine peaches and grapes, to say nothing of vegetables, which he raises at one end of his field, so that he buys the manure from my stable and pays me better for it than many people of higher station; and from affection for the young man's godmother, too, who is a friend of mine, as I told you, for we took our first communion together, I must conceal the misery and shame which Handsome Laurence, as they call him hereabouts, has brought on his nearest relations, and which would arouse the whole town if it should come to be known."

It was perfectly evident that Madame Ouchafol was dying with

longing to favor me with the mystery of Handsome Laurence's scrape. Being more mischievous than inquisitive at that moment, I punished her for her reserve by taking my hat and going out for a breath of air by the pretty little stream which skirts the hillside over which the town is picturesquely scattered.

Many small towns are, like the one in question, charming in their general aspect as seen from outside, but dirty and disgusting within: a sharp rock, a ray of the setting sun on an old spire, a beautiful line of forest behind, a stream at the foot, are sufficient for the groundwork of a picture which shows them at their best, and of which they form the principal features, arranged to suit the artist's pleasure.

I was wholly engrossed by the tranquil pleasure of contemplation, and I watched the last reflections of the sun's light fade away in a wonderfully clear sky. That presage of fine weather for the morrow reminded me of the plan I had formed to visit a cascade which one of my predecessors in the office I then held had advised me to see. It was then too late for an expedition of any length; but, as I passed a rustic wine-shop, brightly lighted and noisy, I determined to go in and make some inquiries.

I landed in the midst of a village wedding. There was drinking and dancing. The first person who observed my presence was Handsome Laurence himself.

"I say, Père Tournache," he cried in a musical voice, strong and clear, which drowned all the others, "here's a traveller! Wait upon him at once. Just because we are enjoying ourselves in your house, you mustn't forget people who are entitled to accommodations—Come, monsieur," he added, giving me his chair, "there's no seat anywhere. Take mine, I am going to dance a boree in the barn, and as I go I will send someone to wait on you."

"I do not wish to disturb anyone," I replied, touched by his courtesy, but not at all tempted by the aspect and smell of the festivities. "I came in to ask for some information."

"Can I give it to you?"

"Better than anyone probably; I would like to know in which direction and how far away the cliff and waterfall of La Volpie are."

"Very good; come with me and I will show you as well as I can."

As the handsome fellow seemed to me a little tipsy, despite his courtesy and his desire to oblige, I followed him more from politeness than with any hope of obtaining an intelligible explanation.

"Look," he said, after leading the way, somewhat unsteadily, about ten paces from the house, "do you see that long level hill which shuts out the horizon? It is higher than it looks; it is a genuine mountain, which it takes a good hour to climb. Now do you see a sort of cleft that runs diagonally from the highest point, just over the top of the church steeple? That's the place."

"I confess that I can see nothing. It is dark, and I probably shall have some difficulty in finding my way to-morrow; couldn't I find

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somebody hereabout to guide me there?"

"I was going to propose myself as your companion for the day after to-morrow, as I am intending to go there; but to-morrow is too soon."

"I am sorry."

"And so am I; but what would you have! I absolutely must get drunk to-night, and it is probable that I shall sleep all day to-morrow."

"Is it urgently necessary that you should be drunk?"

"Yes, I could do no less than drink a glass or two to celebrate the wedding of an old play-fellow. In a quarter of an hour, if I drink no more, I shall be melancholy. I am always clear-headed and argumentative at first. I prefer to finish myself, to be lively, sentimental, wild and silly; after that, I go to sleep and it's all over."

"There's no harm in being lively, sentimental, wild, and even silly, as you say; but sometimes people are ugly in their cups. Aren't you afraid that that will ever happen to you?"

"No; I am satisfied that wine, when it is not poisoned, develops and brings out a man's natural qualities, good or bad, and no others. I am not of an ugly disposition, I do not drink absinthe, so I am sure of myself."

"Very good; but you spoke of dancing?"

"Yes, dancing is intoxicating too. That great bagpipe braying in your ears, the movement, the heat, the dust, and all the rest—it's fascinating, I tell you!"

He spoke with an accent of melancholy, almost of despair, in which I fancied that I could see a sign of some secret sorrow or pitiless remorse. The landlady's words recurred to my mind, and I was seized with a feeling of compassion for that well-favored youth, who expressed himself so well, and who seemed to be of such a gentle and honest disposition.

"Suppose that, instead of finishing yourself so quickly, you should stay here awhile and smoke a good cigar with me?"

"No, I should become melancholy, and I should bore you to death."

"That is my lookout."

"And mine too. Come, I see that you are a man of parts and that it would be very pleasant to talk with you; don't go to La Volpie until the day after to-morrow."

"Do me the favor to go there with me to-morrow, and to refrain from getting drunk to-night."

"Do you know, you speak as if you took some special interest in me? Do you know me?"

"I never saw you until to-day."

"Really? I know that you are the inspector of finances who has been staying with Mère Ouchafol for a couple of days; you spend four months every year travelling about the province. Have you never met me anywhere?"



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"Never. Are you known away from here?"

"I travelled for three years in almost every part of France. Tell me why you advise me not to drink."

"Because I don't like bedraggled things nor degraded men. It's a mere matter of neatness and decency, that's all!"

He mused for a moment, then asked me my age.

"About the same as your own, thirty years."

"No, I am twenty-six. Do I look as if I were thirty, pray?"

"I can't see you plainly in the twilight."

"On the contrary," he rejoined sadly, "I fancy that you do see me very plainly. I must have lost four years of my life, as my face makes me four years too old. I will not drink too much to-night, and if you would like to go to La Volpie to-morrow, I will knock at your door at four in the morning. I know that you must be in town at noon. The collector spoke to me about you; he says you are a delightful man."

"Thanks! I rely on you."

"Would you like to see a genuine Auvergne boree before you go away?"

"I will dance it with you, if I may be allowed."

"They will all be delighted, but I shall have to introduce you as my friend."

"Very good! it is by no means impossible that I shall become your friend."

"I accept the omen."

I was attracted by the fellow, I did not resist the attraction, and whatever the *frightful scrape* might be for which the hostess of the *Grand Monarque* blamed him, the curiosity he aroused in me was very like sympathy.

In the barn to which he took me, where the noise, the dust and the heat of which he had spoken left nothing to be desired, I was greeted with much cordiality and invited to drink my fill.

"No, no," cried Laurence, "he doesn't drink, but he dances. Come, my friend, be my vis-à-vis."

He had invited the bride, I invited the tall homely girl whom I had seen on his arm, from the balcony, an hour before. I expected to arouse no jealousy, but I soon discovered that she was a great favorite, perhaps because of her bold and good-humored manner, perhaps too because she had much wit. I would have liked to make her talk about Laurence; but the uproar, which was, so to speak, suffocating, made it impossible to carry on any intelligible conversation.

Laurence was dancing opposite me, and he certainly displayed much coquetry in his performance. He had taken off his seersucker coat and his waistcoat like the others. His shirt, still irreproachably white, outlined his graceful figure, his broad shoulders and his swelling chest; the perspiration curled his abundant jet-black hair; his eyes, lustreless a moment before, flashed fire. He had the grace of movement inseparable from a fine figure and smooth joints, and, although

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he danced the time-honored boree like a genuine peasant, he transformed that heavy and monotonous affair into a character dance full of grace and vim. He had a bit of wine in his legs, to be sure, but in a few moments that tendency to stagger disappeared, and it seemed to me that he was bent upon displaying all his physical advantages to me in order to do away with the bad opinion which I might have formed of him at first sight.

As I wondered what object he could have had in travelling all over France, it occurred to me that he might have been a model. When he returned to the wine-shop, where I accompanied him and where he was asked to sing, I was convinced that he had been a strolling singer; but he had a fresh voice and sang the local ballads with the charming simplicity characteristic of an artist and not of a street-corner performer.

Gradually my ideas with respect to him became confused. I was warm, and I had unsuspectingly accepted several bumpers of a sour wine which seemed very harmless, but which was in reality exceedingly heady. I realized that, if I did not wish to set a bad example to the man at whom I had just been preaching, and if I did not wish to be accused by Madame Ouchafol of some "horrible scrape," I must make my escape from the tipsy effusiveness of those excellent suburbanites. So I slipped away unseen, and as I returned to the town was ashamed to find that I could not walk perfectly straight, that I saw two of every telegraph post, and that I had an altogether unwonted inclination to sing and laugh.

As I supposed that I was drawing near the town my confusion increased. My feet became very heavy, and when I had walked what seemed an unconscionable time, I discovered that the town was no longer on the hill, or else that I was no longer on the road to the town. A fine situation for a public official, and especially for one of the soberest of men, who had never been caught by drunkenness in his whole life.

I thought, for my brain had remained perfectly clear, that that intoxication had come too quickly not to disappear in the same way. I resolved to wait until it had vanished, and, spying an open hovel which seemed to be deserted, I went in and threw myself on a pile of straw, heedless of the proximity of a jackass who stood with his nose in the empty crib, fast asleep.

I followed his example, and fell into a slumber as peaceful as his. When I woke the day was beginning to break, the ass was still asleep, and yet he was restless as to his legs and moved his ankle chains from time to time. I had some difficulty in satisfying myself as to how I happened to be in that place and in that company; at last, memory returned, I rose, shook my clothes, smoothed my hair, rehabilitated myself to some extent in my own eyes by the discovery that I had not lost my hat, and, feeling absolutely sober, resumed my journey without difficulty to the *Grand Monarque Hotel*, saying to myself that

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Madame Ouchafol would not fail to attribute my unseasonable return to some amorous adventure. I had barely time to make my toilet and swallow a cup of coffee; for as the clock struck four handsome Laurence knocked at my door. He had not slept at all, he had danced and sung all night; but he had kept his promise to me, he was not drunk. He had plunged into the stream on leaving the wedding feast; the bath had refreshed and rested him; he boasted that he could swim and dive like a duck. He was light-hearted, active, beautiful as Apollo, and seemed four years younger. I complimented him sincerely, but could not conquer the false shame which took possession of me when he noticed that my bed had not been occupied. Confusion! I ventured to reply that I had worked all night; luckily the ass, the sole witness of my degradation, was incapable of betraying it.

Laurence had supped at two in the morning; he was neither hungry nor thirsty. His only luggage consisted of a staff and a sketch-book, which he permitted me to examine. He drew very well, representing nature boldly and conscientiously. We started across the fields, and were soon climbing the long slope of the mountain by a road which, although very rough and hard, was delightfully cool and afforded lovely views.

We did not really begin to converse until we had reached the precipitous cliffs where the Volpie plunges perpendicularly down into a deep ravine. It is a small affair, very beautiful, but difficult to approach near enough to obtain a good view.

We remained there two hours, and there it was that Laurence revealed to me the *horrible mystery* of his life.

I pass over the conversation which led up little by little to this opening of his heart. He told me in all sincerity that he had long felt an intense desire to unburden himself to a man who was indulgent enough and civilized enough to understand him. He fancied that I was such a man. I promised him that he should not regret his confidence, and he began thus:

## STORY OF A ROLLING STONE

I know that I am handsome, not only because I have heard it said, but because I have actually been told so under circumstances which I shall never forget. Moreover, I have sufficient artistic education to know what constitutes beauty, and I know that I am endowed with all the qualities which it demands.

You will soon see how far I am from being vain of it when you learn that it is the source of my greatest sorrows. I once loved a woman who spurned me because I was not ugly.

You know that my name is Pierre Laurence, and that I am the son of a peasant of this neighborhood, now a nurseryman and market-

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gardener. My father is the best of men, although absolutely uncultivated—a fact which does not interfere with my veneration for his uprightness and gentle nature. My uncle is Baron Laurence, a parvenu ennobled by Louis Philippe and enriched by trade. He is settled in Normandie, in a fine old château where I went to see him once, after completing my studies, at the command of my father, who relied upon his promises and upon his remembrance of him. I do not know whether he is selfish, whether he despises the humble family from which he sprung, or whether I lacked the gift of pleasing him. Certain it is that, fresh from school, impregnated with the new ideas and afflicted with unconquerable pride, I allowed him to see that I did not come to him of my own motion, that I preferred to die rather than share his opinions and court his worldly goods. In a word, he asked me what I needed; I answered him boastfully that I needed nothing. He told me that I was a handsome fellow because I looked like him, that he was glad to see me, and that he was going out to push his candidacy for the Chamber of Deputies. I started back to Paris without unstrapping my valise. That was seven years ago, and I have never seen him since; I have never written to him. I am perfectly sure that he will disinherit me; he is a bachelor, but he has a housekeeper. I bear him no grudge for that. I know that, save for his truckling to anybody in power, he is a most excellent man, and as charitable as he is called upon to be. He owes me nothing. I have not the slightest reason for reproaching him. He made his money himself, and he is entirely at liberty to dispose of it as he sees fit.

My father doesn't take the matter so philosophically. If he has made sacrifices for my education, he has done it in the hope that I would some day be a monsieur. That is not my fault. I asked nothing better than to be a peasant. I was perfectly happy in our humble environment, and I always came back here with a feeling of regret that I had ever gone away. My only pleasure at the present time consists in watering the flowers and vegetables on our place, trimming the trees, trundling the wheelbarrow and compelling my old father to rest a little.

I love the companions of my childhood. Their rustic manners are very far from offensive to me; so far as I am able to forget my disappointments, I do it in their company. To drink and sing, to work and chat with those honest fellows, these are my principal diversions. I misuse my strength a little; sometimes I feel inclined to preserve it in order to run the faster in pursuit of my dream; sometimes I am more inclined to exhaust it altogether, so that I may forget my dream.

Everybody in the province can tell you that I am kind-hearted, trustworthy, discreet and unselfish. But the bourgeois reproach me with having no ambition and no trade, as if cultivating the ground were not one!

My father is in comfortable circumstances as measured by his necessities. He has some twenty thousand francs invested, and he has

never been called upon to pay the most trivial debt incurred by me. I inherited ten thousand francs from my mother. I have spent the whole of it, and this is how I did it.

After passing my examinations for the bachelor's degree at Paris and paying my respects to my uncle in Normandie, I came back here to ask my father what he wished me to do.

"You must go back to Paris," he said; "you must become an advocate or a magistrate, one or the other. You talk easily; you cannot fail to be a *great talker*. Study law. I know that it takes ten thousand francs or so to live there for two or three years. I will sell half of my property. If I am in want in my old age, you will see to it that I am not left without bread."

I refused my father's offer. I sacrificed simply my individual inheritance. He consented to that, and I returned to Paris, determined to work and to become a great talker, in order to gratify the author of my being, and in some measure to satisfy myself as well. Some temperamental instinct impelled me to put myself forward, to stretch out or contract my strong and supple arms, to soothe myself with the sound of my powerful voice. How shall I express it? a sort of display of my natural advantages seemed to me either a duty or a right, I do not know which; but ambition had no part in it, as you will see.

There was a Latin quarter even in those days. The students had not crossed the Seine. They did not keep *demoiselles*, they still danced with grisettes, a genus which was already beginning to disappear, and which has since disappeared. It was just after 1848.

I was of too stout a temper to be afraid to drive work and pleasure abreast. I soon made friends. A young fellow who is strong and fearless, generous and affectionate, good-tempered and noisy, always finds that a phalanx of followers gathers about him. We were in all the *mélées* at the balls, at the theatre, at the lectures and in the streets.

I will not describe the adventures and excitements of my first year. I returned to the country for the vacation. I had worked hard and had not been extravagant. My father was delighted with me.

"Monsieur le baron will change his mind," he said.

My old comrades in the faubourg voted me a delightful fellow because with them, I became a peasant once more. In the following winter, after the reopening of the schools, a woman decided my destiny.

We youngsters went to all the first nights at the Odéon. We made a great uproar over the plays which we would have none of and over those we wished to encourage. There was at that time a young woman who played the *petite amoureuse* rôles at the Odéon, and whose name appeared in the bills as Mademoiselle Impéria. Her performances in what was called the repertory passed unnoticed. She was wonderfully pretty and distinguished looking, and cold by nature, lack of experience or shyness; the public paid no attention to her. In those

days a woman might act Molière's Isabelles and Lucindes and secondary tragic parts for ten years without attracting the slightest notice and without obtaining the slightest promotion, unless possessed of influence in high places. This girl had no patron in the ministry, no friend on the press, nor did she scheme to win the sympathy of the public. She spoke her lines intelligently, she was graceful and modest; one felt that she was a conscientious artist, but that she lacked inspiration and energy and had not the faintest trace of coquetry. Her eyes never questioned the proscenium boxes, and when she lowered them, in order to produce the legitimate effect of her part, she did not cast upon the orchestra stalls that veiled and wanton glance which seems to say: "I know all about the things that the character I represent seems to know nothing of."

I cannot say why it was that, after witnessing with indifference her performance in several unimportant rôles, I was suddenly so impressed by her modest and reserved features that I asked my companions during an entr'acte if they did not think her charming. They declared that she was pretty, but quite without charm on the stage. One of them had seen her play Agnès; he insisted that she had no comprehension of that classic creation, and a discussion arose. Should Agnès be represented as a sly minx who feigns innocence, or as a veritable child, who makes very bold remarks without understanding their meaning? I upheld the latter theory, and although I cared little whether I was right or not, the first time that the *Ecole des Femmes* appeared on the bill, I left the Café Molière and went to see the play. I don't know why I was ashamed to tell anybody of my purpose. The students never listen to the old repertory, which however, with a view to their instruction, the regulations require to be played at the second Théâtre-Français. We are all supposed to know the classics by heart, and many declare that they are surfeited with that venerable fare, although they only know brief fragments and have never grasped its meaning nor appreciated its merits.

I was in that plight like many another, and, after a few scenes I was conscious of a feeling of remorse because I had never before appreciated that delightful masterpiece. We are no longer romantic, we are too sceptical for that; nevertheless romanticism has impregnated the very air we breathe; we have retained its unjust and supercilious features, and we despise the classics but do little more justice to those who have dethroned them.

The more keenly I relished the old master's amusing yet profound work, the more I was impressed by the charm of the cruel Agnès; I say cruel, because Arnolphe, despite his folly, is certainly a most unhappy and interesting character; he loves and his love is not returned! He is selfish in love, he is a man. His suffering escapes by fits and starts, in beautiful lines which find an echo in the hearts of all men who are in love, whatever their fate. In almost all of Molière's plays there is a background of heart-rending sorrow which sooner or

later effaces the absurdity attaching to the deceived and jealous lover. The common herd never suspects it. Those actors who study their rôles conscientiously are struck by it, and that strain of sadness embarrasses them; for if they bring out its tearful meaning, the common herd doesn't understand, thinks that they are parodying grief and laughs all the louder. Amid that hearty laughter there are very, very few of the spectators who say in their neighbor's ear that Molière was a wounded eagle, a profoundly sad heart. But that is true, for I too have studied him, and in all his cuckolds I find the misanthrope. Arnolphe is a bourgeoisie Alceste, Agnès a Célimène in embryo.

But Mademoiselle Impéria made Agnès interesting by the absolute sincerity of her innocence, by certain outcries, not plaintive, but rather vigorous and wrathful, against oppression. Even while I wondered whether she had the right idea of the part, it was impossible for me not to be impressed and carried away by her face and her attitude. I dreamed of her that night; the next day after that I walked along the galleries of the Odéon on the pretext of visiting the old bookshops, returning always to the little latticed door by which the employes of the theatre go in and out, and the artists on their way to and from rehearsal; but I waited and watched to no purpose: they were rehearsing a new piece in which Impéria had no part. All that I could succeed in finding out, by listening to the conversation of those who went in and out, was that she was ordered to attend the rehearsals beginning on the following day, the actress who was cast for the *ingénue* part being indisposed and in danger of being ill on the day of the first performance. I saw an urchin come out with a notice for her, and as he carried the paper with the ends of his fingers, apparently thinking of something else, I followed him with a treacherous plan in my mind; I pretended to be as distraught as he, and jostled him just as he was slipping between two of the omnibuses which stand outside the theatre. The paper dropped; I picked it up and handed it to him after wiping it on my sleeve, although it was not soiled. I had time to read the address: "To Mademoiselle Impéria, Rue Carnot, No. 17."

When the boy had gone on his way, it occurred to me to give him five francs and do the errand in his place. I dared not. However, I was intoxicated with my discovery as with a triumph. The first object of an ingenuous lover's dreams is to know his divinity's address, as if that carried him one step toward success!

Nevertheless I followed the little messenger at a distance. I saw him enter No. 17, one of the poorest houses in that poor street, which was neither paved nor lighted. I quickened my pace and met him as he came out, calling to the concierge to deliver the note as soon as Mademoiselle *What's-Her-Name* came in.

Mademoiselle *What's-Her-Name!* Profanation! I was ignorant of the free-and-easy manners of everybody connected with the theatre, even with the most dignified theatres. My courage rose, for she was not at home. I might learn something about her from the concierge.

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I resolutely entered a dark porch and asked for Mademoiselle Impéria through the window.

"Out!" was the curt reply of a stout old woman, who, despite her abrupt manner, had a pleasant face.

"When will she return?"

"I don't know."

She eyed me from head to foot with a half-mocking, half-kindly expression, and added:

"Have you her permission to call on her?"

"Why, certainly," I replied, in dire confusion.

"Let me see it!" rejoined the old woman, holding out her hand.

I was about to take to my heels but she detained me.

"Look you, my boy," she said, "you are one of the pretty fellows who think they have only to show themselves; they come here every day, and it is a great bore to this young actress, for she's as virtuous as a little angel. Our orders are to tell all fine gentlemen that she never receives anyone. So don't take the trouble to come again; good-night and good luck to you!"

And with a sneering laugh and a great clatter she raised the sash which she had lowered to speak to me.

I withdrew, humiliated and overjoyed. Impéria was virtuous, perhaps as innocent as she seemed. I was over head and ears in love. I no longer laughed at my fancy, I clung to it as to my life.

I will not tell you all the plans that I imagined, all the efforts I made to force myself to enter the theatre the next day. I dared not do it; but, on the second day, as I saw many people of all classes go in and out through that little door, which did not seem to be guarded, I mustered courage to open it and passed before a tiny box for the concierge, where there was no one but a child. I had seized a moment when two workmen were going in, and followed close on their heels; the child, who was playing with a cat, hearing steps and voices which he knew, did not so much as look at me.

The workmen whom I followed went up five or six steps, made a half turn to the right, went up two or three more steps leading to the main staircase, passed through a heavy swinging door and disappeared. I stood still for a moment, undecided what to do. Thereupon the child spied me.

"Who do you want to see?" he called out.

"Monsieur Eugène!" I answered at random, and I had no idea why that name came to my lips instead of some other.

"Don't know him," said the boy. "Perhaps you mean Monsieur Constant?"

"Yes, yes, I beg your pardon! That's the name! Monsieur Constant."

"Go straight upstairs."

And he returned to his cat, which he was busily engaged in attiring in a woman's cap, probably his mother's.



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What was I to say to Monsieur Constant? and who was Monsieur Constant? I started to follow the workmen through the swinging door.

"That ain't the way!" cried the child; "that's the way to the stage!"

"I know that well enough, *parbleu!*" I rejoined in an irritated tone. "I have some business there first."

He allowed himself to be blinded by my audacity. In two strides I found myself on the boards, attracted by the reassuring obscurity which I had foreseen, and in which it took me several moments to distinguish my surroundings.

I was at the back of the stage, and my first impulse was to slip behind a canvas which—I shall always remember it—represented a bit of garden with gigantic hortensias which I took at first for gourds. I stood there, undecided and with wildly beating heart, until my two machinists, passing close to me and grasping two ropes attached to pulleys, said to me: "If you please, monsieur, move away from there! Look out for the *plantation!*"

They removed my refuge and my shelter; two other workmen unrolled the cylinder which was to substitute the walls of a room for the garden, and they in their turn shouted to me:

"Make room for the *plantation!*"

The *plantation!* what could that mean? When one is practising fraud, one readily believes in direct allusions. I remembered the sign at my father's gate: "*Thomas Laurence's plantation!*" and I fancied that they were making sport of me. But it was not so. The *plantation*, in the vernacular of the stage, consists in setting up for the rehearsal scenery of some sort to represent the scenic arrangements of the play itself, and to regulate the entrances and exits of the characters. If the stage-setting is to change during the play, the scene-shifters change or modify the *plantation* after each act of the rehearsal.

I took refuge on a broad wooden staircase which leads to a sort of platform at the rear of the stage behind all the scenery. I found myself face to face with a hairdresser, who was dressing a magnificent Louis XIV. wig, and who took no notice of me.

Suddenly a voice from I don't know where called:

"Constant!"

The hair-dresser didn't budge. He was not the man. I breathed again.

"Constant!" cried another voice.

And someone at my right opened the padded door of a room furnished with red benches, which I took to be the actors' green-room. The hair-dresser bestirred himself then, for the individual who appeared through that door, and at whom I dared not look, seemed to be possessed of supreme authority.

"Constant is yonder, Monsieur Jourdain," said the artist in hair.

And he ran toward a dark passageway at the left, shouting:

"Constant! the director wants you."

I was on the point of being caught between two fires, the director

## A ROLLING STONE

in person on the one hand, and on the other the mysterious Constant, with whom I had declared that I wished to speak, and with whom I was absolutely unacquainted. I fled by the way I had come, and seeking always the darkest spots, rushed into the wings at the left, where I stumbled upon a fireman in undress uniform who said to me with an oath:

“Take care! can’t you see where you’re going?”

As I asked his pardon most courteously, and as his only duties were to guard against the danger of fire, he made no objection to telling me where to go so that I should be in nobody’s way. He pointed to a sort of flying bridge leading from the stage to the orchestra, and I hastened to cross it, although it was very insecure.

The theatre was as dark as the stage; I tried to sit down, and finding myself in a very uncomfortable position, I ascertained that the chairs were turned up and that broad bands of green canvas were stretched over each row of stalls in the orchestra. Then something was lighted on the stage and several persons crossed the bridge and came toward me. Once more I fled. I reached the corridor on the street-floor, and, spying an open box, I darted into it and kept out of sight. There I could not be discovered unless by the agency of an attack of coughing or an indiscreet sneeze.

But what had I gained? In the first place Impéria was not at the rehearsal; her fellow-actress, the leading *igénue*, had recovered and resumed her part, with no inclination to allow herself to be replaced. Impéria, as an understudy liable to be called upon at a moment’s notice, should be in the theatre, to study the *mise en scène* and to listen to such remarks as the author and manager might make to the *ingénue*. How was I to distinguish and recognize anyone in that enormous hall, almost empty, and lighted only by three lamps hung upon posts set up on the stage, which cast a ghastly light, broken by huge patches of shadow, upon surrounding objects? Of that dim smoky light, which was made even more deceptive by a sunbeam that fell from the flies upon a jutting angle of the scenery, none at all reached the centre of the hall. The whole audience consisted of about half a score of persons seated in the orchestra stalls with their backs toward me. They were probably the manager, the costumer, the leader of the claque, one of the physicians, in a word, members of the staff, artists or employes; and there were three or four women, one of whom presumably was she in whose presence I had hoped to stand. But how was I to approach her? Unquestionably, persons unconnected with the establishment were denied admission at rehearsals, and I could not without a falsehood claim to have business with anyone; in any event, my falsehood being readily discovered, I should be expelled with contumely, with no right to demand that it should be done with any ceremony.

From time to time the sound of brooms, of carpets being shaken, of doors being closed violently, came from the rear of the hall. One

of the persons seated in the orchestra cried out: "Hush! stop that noise!" then turned and seemed to explore every nook and corner with an angry and penetrating glance, which I fancied that I could feel fall on me. I made myself small and held my breath. I dared not leave the box for fear of betraying my presence. At last that Cerberus, the manager, rose and interrupted the rehearsal, declaring that the boxes and galleries must be cleaned and swept either before or after the rehearsals, as it was impossible to work in such an uproar and with so much to divert the attention. Thus they took away my last hope, for it had occurred to me to bribe one of those subordinate employes and to take his place the next day.

Another idea passed through my brain. Was it impossible to introduce myself as an actor? What I had seen of the rehearsal had shown me how little initiative is left to the artist, how his task is chewed for him, so to speak. I had not the faintest idea of what is called *mise en scène*, and the majority of theatre-goers have no more idea of it than I had. They artlessly believe that the marvellous order, the smoothness of the movements and meetings of the characters on the stage, which are all arranged to facilitate the exchange of lines without apparent premeditation, to emphasize the effects and to give every situation, no matter how unimportant, its proper relief, are spontaneous results due to the intelligence of the actors or the logic of the dialogue. But the contrary is the fact. Ordinary artists either lack intelligence, or have too much, or don't display it; or else think too much about the effect they hope to produce and deliberately sacrifice verisimilitude to do it so far as the attitudes and situations of the other actors are concerned. The *mise en scène* may be compared to a military order which regulates the bearing, the gestures, the play of feature of every member of the cast, even the most unimportant. One can mark with chalk on the floor the space over which each person is at liberty to move at a given moment, the number of steps he must take, the angle to be formed by his arm in a certain gesture, the precise spot on which a body is to fall, the pose to be assumed by the body in supposititious sleep or swooning, in every fall, burlesque or tragic—all these things, so far as the classic repertory is concerned, are regulated by absolute traditions. In new plays, all these details require much feeling of the way, experiments which may be abandoned, or may be adopted and insisted on: hence disputes, sometimes very warm, in which the author passes judgment as the court of last resort, at the risk of making a sad mistake, if he lacks insight, taste and experience. Artists, at all events those who have a certain authority due to their talent, also join in the discussion; they cry out against the author's demands, just or unjust. The little fellows say nothing; they suffer and keep out of sight. If they are awkward or unattractive, the author may be obliged to sacrifice an effect which he thought worth while, and to make the best use he can of their natural parts; and even then the use to be made of those parts must be carefully marked out for them, so

that they may not make the slightest change in a hundred performances. The actor who extemporizes his effects at the performance runs the risk of ruining the play; he confuses all those who act with him. And not only does a misplaced word in a cue throw them off the track, but an unexpected gesture, an unusual attitude. Thus the *mise en scène* is something in which everybody has a part; the actor is no more at liberty therein than a common soldier in a dress parade.

Noticing this fact, I fancied that one could soon learn the trade without special studies, and with no other talent than that which the managers mark out for him and suggest to him, for I heard them dictating and *chanting* intonations to the beginners and even to the experienced actors, when they carelessly misplaced their emphasis.

"Why should I not undergo that apprenticeship," I said to myself, "even though it leads me to nothing more than the joy of approaching the woman I love? I will try it."

As soon as my mind was made up, I felt more comfortable in my hiding-place. Illusion soon becomes complete in a brain of twenty years. It seemed to me that I was already one of the company, that I belonged to the theatre, that I was entitled to be where I was.

When a plan takes shape in my mind, I have no rest until I have put it in execution. The rehearsal of the second act came to an end and they stopped there; they discussed back and forth, from the stalls to the stage, the question whether it was necessary to repeat those two acts on the next day, or whether they should begin work on the third act. The manager had risen and was walking toward the bridge to return to the stage.

I seized that moment to leave my box, and hasten, with perfect self-possession, toward the exit from the stalls. I reached that spot simultaneously with three women; one was tall and thin, another old and stout, the third was quite young, but she was not Impéria. So I had no other emotion to repress than that aroused by the thought of measuring swords with the management. I returned to the stage, where I boldly joined a group about the author and the manager. The latter was insisting on the necessity of making a cut in the play. The author, completely crushed, yielded sorely against his will.

"Come into my office," said the manager, "we will attend to it at once."

It had never occurred to me to examine this manager, I was so excited; but everybody knew him: he was Bocage, Bocage the great actor. I had never seen him act, being a new-comer in Paris; but his noble face was like one of the monuments of the quarter, and one had but to be a student to love Bocage. He allowed us to sing the *Marseillaise* between the acts, and when we called for it the orchestra gave us it without demur. That lasted until the day when the *Marseillaise* was officially declared to be seditious. Bocage resisted the decree, he was cashiered.

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His face inspired me with heroic courage. There was not a moment to lose. I accosted him resolutely.

"What do you want of me?" he said, with brusque politeness.

"I would like to talk with you five minutes."

"Five minutes is a long time; I haven't it to spare."

"Three minutes, then! two!"

"One has passed already. Wait a quarter of an hour for me in the actors' green-room."

He passed on, and I heard him say:

"Constant, who in the deuce is that tall fellow whom you have allowed to get as far as the stage?"

"A tall fellow?" said Constant, who proved to be concierge and general *factotum* at the Odéon.

"Yes, a very handsome fellow."

Constant held the door of the green-room ajar and glanced at me with his penetrating little eyes; then let the door swing back, saying:

"Faith, I know nothing about him! Who in the devil let him in?"

"Say that I did," the first *jeune comique*—the Frontin of the company—said to me carelessly as he passed.

He entered the green-room, which Bocage had passed through. Constant, being pulled and handled by five or six other people, and sustaining a shower of questions and requests with the self-possession of a man accustomed to live in a hurly-burly, went out by another door. I was left alone for a moment with the *comique*, a great favorite with the public.

"Do you really mean," I asked him, "that I can refer to you?"

"*Parbleu*, yes," he replied, without looking at me. And he vanished, shouting to the hair-dresser: "My wig, Thomas, how about my wig for to-night?"

I found myself in a low, oblong room, adorned with portraits of famous authors and actors. But I looked at nothing; I simply counted the beats of my agitated heart. When the clock struck five, I had been waiting three-quarters of an hour. The bustle and uproar on the stage had gradually diminished; everybody had gone to dine. I dared not move; the manager had certainly forgotten me.

At last Constant reappeared, napkin in hand. In the midst of his meal he had remembered me, the honest fellow!

"Monsieur Bocage is still here," he said. "Do you want to speak to him?"

"Surely," I replied.

Thereupon he led me to one of the offices of the management, where I found myself in Bocage's presence. The great artist glanced at me with a beautiful, kindly eye, which did not lack shrewdness, pointed to a chair, asked me to wait a minute, gave Constant five or six orders in less than a minute, wrote a few lines on each of half a dozen sheets of paper, and, when we were alone, asked me what I wanted, in a most amiable tone, which signified none the less: "Make

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haste!"

"I would like to go on the stage."

He looked at me again.

"You certainly wouldn't make a bad figure there. A fine *jeune premier*! Where do you come from?"

"I have no recommendation."

"Then you're not from the Conservatoire?"

"No, monsieur, I am a law student."

"And you propose to leave a profession in which, I have no doubt, your parents—"

"No, Monsieur Bocage, I do not propose to leave it. I am a hard worker, although I am fond of pleasure. I intend to continue my studies until I am admitted as an advocate; after that I will see."

"So you think that one can go on the stage without special study?"

"I have done no studying for it, but I can."

"Very good; do so, if you can, and come and see us again. At present I can only judge your exterior."

"Is that all right?"

"More than all right. Your voice is fine, your pronunciation excellent. You seem to move easily and gracefully."

"And is that all that is necessary?"

"Oh, no, indeed! You must work. I urge you to begin."

"As you are so kind and so patient as to give me a moment of your time, tell me what I must do."

He reflected a moment, then replied:

"You must see plenty of acting. Do you attend the theatres?"

"Like all other students, no more nor less."

"That is not enough. I like your face, you see, but I don't know you. Bring me to-morrow evidence that you are an honorable man, and you shall have not only free admission to the performance, but also the *entrée* of the stage, so that you can follow the regular work of the repertory; that is all I can do for you now. I need not tell you, that if you manifest any lack of discretion or propriety in the relations which you may form with the artists and employes, I cannot save you from being ejected summarily."

"I will bring you to-morrow sufficient proof that you have nothing to fear. I should be a miserable wretch if I should give you any reason to regret your kindness to me!"

He was impressed by the sincerity of my emotion, for tears of joy and gratitude had come to my eyelids. He offered me his hand and took his hat, saying:

"Until to-morrow, at the same time as to-day."

I instantly made the circuit of all the people who knew me. Without giving them an inkling of my love for an actress, I told them I could obtain my *entrée* at the theatre if they were willing to give a good account of me. In two hours I had a list of more than twenty names. My landlord, my tailor, my bootmaker, and my hatter attested with

equal warmth that I was a most excellent fellow, irreproachable in every respect. My comrades did still better: they insisted on escorting me to the manager's office the next day, with their students' cards stuck in their hats. They were not admitted, for Constant was on his guard; but Bocage saw them from the window, smiled at them in answer to their salutations, and signed a document giving me unrestricted admission to all parts of the establishment. It was a very great favor, which was granted to a few young artists only, and I was nothing as yet.

That very evening I attended the performance. Alas! Impéria was not to appear until Friday; but I determined to become acquainted with the actors of my own age and to obtain a foothold in the green-room, so that I might be certain of meeting her there.

Naturally I thanked the young *comique* for the protection he had proffered me. He already knew of my adventure. He had witnessed the ovation, if I may so describe it, which had commended me to Bocage's confidence. He presented me to his comrades as an *aspirant with a backing*, discharged innumerable bewildering jests at me, and left me completely dazed by that stage wit, in comparison with which that of the second-year student is very heavy, colorless and provincial.

In three days I was quite at home there, except that I was conscious how far I was from catching the tone of the establishment. I had a feeling too that my position as a sort of supernumerary on sufferance gave me no right to make myself comfortable. I trembled lest I should incur the slightest reproach from the manager who had so generously thrown the door open to me. So that I imposed upon myself a reserved and courteous attitude which was all the easier to me because, realizing my inferiority as I did, I should not have cut a very brilliant figure in repartee. I must say too that the actors, generally speaking, were persons of much tact and good manners; devoid of stiffness or affectation, they had the tone of the best society, and it is certain that I learned more by listening to their conversation in the entr'actes than by watching them at work. Two or three of them were privileged to say anything, but they did not abuse that privilege openly, in the presence of women; all of the latter had the art of enforcing respect at the theatre, whatever their private morals may have been.

So I took lessons in deportment and in that simplicity of bearing which is the stamp of a good education. They had all learned in theory the best way of carrying themselves in society, and in the very highest circles they would have appeared as courtly and dignified as on the stage. They had become accustomed to that sort of thing, and there was no difference, even when they were in merry mood, between the characters they represented and their real characters. I realized all that I lacked of being a civilized man; love suggested to me the ambition to make myself agreeable. I was almost pleased that I had not as yet to meet Impéria's eyes, and in order not to delay the metamorphosis which I was determined to effect, I left the wine-shop, I turned my

back on billiards, I vanished from the *Closerie*, I devoted to legal and literary studies all the time that I did not pass at the theatre. My friends complained; they had never seen me so serious and orderly in my habits.

At last, Friday arrived. During the five days that I had been certain of seeing her near at hand, of speaking to her, perhaps, I had never once ventured to utter Impéria's name, and, whether from chance or from indifference, no one had ever spoken of her in my presence. *Phèdre* was on the bill, and Impéria's name also appeared upon it; she was to play Aricie. I had already learned to dress becomingly with my modest wardrobe. I passed an hour at my toilet; I looked at myself in the mirror as a woman would have done; I asked myself a hundred times if my face, which had pleased Bocage and Constant, would not fail to please her. I forgot to dine. I was walking under the galleries of the Odéon before the gas was lighted; I was in the direst distress, and at the same time my head was swimming with intoxicating joy.

At last the clock strikes the hour and I enter the greenroom; no one there as yet save an old woman accompanied by a tall, thin girl, in a Grecian costume, who looks at herself in dismay in the mirror and says that she is ready to faint. I bow and take my seat on a bench. I wonder if that robe and those white bands are the costume, somewhat too pretentious surely, of a mere *figurante*. Oenone arrives in her scarlet tunic covered with a broad tawny peplum. She sits down in an easy-chair, with her feet on the fire-dogs, and exclaims:

"What beastly weather!"

Old tragediennes often copy the manners of a sublieutenant of the Empire which Mademoiselle Georges affected. Comedy imparts good breeding; tragedy, which trenches on the superhuman, produces by reaction a craving to enter into reality to the greatest possible extent.

The old woman in a plaid shawl who accompanied the young Greek goes to Oenone and with a low reverence begs her to cast a glance at her daughter's costume.

"What does this mean?" cried Phèdre's nurse; "is she to play Aricie to-night?"

"For the first time, Madame Régine. She is terribly frightened, poor child! I tell her that it's great luck for her that Mademoiselle Impéria is sick; if it wasn't for that "

"Impéria sick?" cries Thésée, entering at that moment; "what a pity! Is it anything serious?"

"So it seems," replied the mother, "for Mademoiselle Impéria wouldn't give up her part for a finger-ache."

Hippolyte enters next.

"Did you know that little Impéria is sick?"

"I have just heard so. It seems too that it's something serious."

"What is it, pray?" says Oenone; "what is the matter with the child?"



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"Here's the doctor," says éène—"What's the matter with our Aricie, doctor?"

"I am afraid of typhoid fever," is the doctor's answer.

"The devil! poor dear! what a pity! Have you seen her to-day?"

"Two hours ago."

"It must have developed all of a sudden, as we knew nothing about it," says Oenone.

"So suddenly," replies the new Aricie's mother, "that my daughter hasn't even been able to have a partial rehearsal."

"She thinks of nothing but her daughter, that creature!" said Oenone, rising; "for my part, I feel very grieved. Impéria is poor, with no family, no backing of any sort, did you know it? I'll wager that she hasn't so much as a cat with her, and not twenty francs in her little purse! Messieurs and mesdames, we will make up a little subscription between the acts, and as soon as I am dead, I'll go and see the sick girl. Who will come with me, to help me take care of her if she's delirious?"

"I will!" I cried, as pale as death, and utterly unable to restrain myself any longer.

"Who are you?" said Oenone, looking at me with a bewildered air.

"They are beginning, mesdames and messieurs!" cried the monitor, jangling his bell.

This sudden interruption relieved me from the attention which my confusion and my desperation would certainly have attracted. I ran at full speed to Impéria's house. There was no one in the concierge's lodge except a deaf old fellow, who finally understood that I was inquiring for the young actress, and said to me:

"It seems that she ain't very well; my wife's with her."

I rushed to the stairs, shouting back at him that I came from the doctor employed at the theatre. He pointed to the rear end of the hall and a door partly open on the ground floor. I passed through two small rooms, wretchedly furnished but exquisitely neat, which looked on a tiny garden, and found myself face to face with the concierge, to whom I repeated the lie I had just told her husband.

She recognized me at once and said with a shake of her head:

"Is this another fable you are telling me?"

"How should I know that Mademoiselle Impéria is sick if I did not come from the theatre?"

"What's the doctor's name?"

I told her.

"I begin to believe you. After all, in the state she's in—Come in with me."

She opened the door, which she held half closed behind her, and I followed her; but when I was in the room where the poor young actress lay on a child's bed, prostrated by fever, I was seized with

dread and remorse. It seemed to me that I was insulting a death agony, and I dared not approach her or even look at her.

"Come, feel her pulse!" said the good woman, "see if the fever's increasing. She isn't conscious, you know."

I must either feel the pulse or abandon my rôle of physician. I had to lift that poor lifeless arm and take that sweet little hand, burning with fever, in mine. Surely nothing could be more chaste than that examination, but I had never studied medicine; I could do nothing for her, I had no right to force my devotion upon her. If she, that shy and austere maiden, should chance to open her eyes and see her hand in a stranger's, her malady would be heightened by my fault. As I made these depressing reflections, I glanced mechanically at a photograph that lay on the table; it was a picture of a man who was neither young nor handsome, a relation doubtless, perhaps her father. It seemed to me that that refined and gentle face looked reproachfully at me. I walked away from the bed and determined to tell the truth to the poor girl's humble nurse.

"I am not a doctor!"

"Ah! there you are! I suspected as much!"

"But I am connected with the theatre, and I know that the other artists are disturbed about their young comrade's isolation—and her poverty too. They are going to take up a collection, and one of the ladies proposes to sit up with her. As I had nothing to do to-night and feared that you might be embarrassed by her illness, I have brought you my subscription. I see that you are devoted to her, and your face tells me that you are kind and honest. Do not let her want for anything, take care of her as if she were your own daughter, and we will help you. I shall not venture to come again unless I am sent for; I have no right to offer my services—"

"But you're in love with her like so many others ain't you? That isn't a crime; you have a kind and honest face too. I will give you leave to come and ask about her at the lodge. That's all. You're too young for a husband, she won't have a lover, and I won't be the one to advise her to make a fool of herself. Come, go away now and set your mind at rest; whether they bring her any money or not, whether they do help me or don't help me, she shall be taken care of like my own daughter, as you said yourself; it was very pretty, but it wasn't necessary. Adieu! take back your money; I have some myself if the little one needs any."

I dared not return to the theatre, I felt that I should be questioned and should betray myself. In view of the condition in which I had left Impéria, I could not assume an indifferent air nor invent another lie. Besides, I was tired of lying, and I blushed for my stratagems. Sincerity is the basis of my character.

To reconcile my conscience and my love, I determined to devote myself to the stage in all earnestness. Hitherto I had not seriously put the question to myself; nor had I asked myself if my passion would

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be durable enough to lead me to marriage. That honest old woman, who had just told me the truth so directly, had touched the key to the situation. I was not too poor perhaps to marry a girl who had nothing, but I was too young to inspire confidence in her. I had no profession, the stage alone could provide me with one at once, if I were able to make the most of my natural gifts. Perhaps it would be only a few months before I should be in receipt of a respectable salary, and even if it was a few years, what did it matter if Impéria loved me and would deign to become engaged to me?

In all my dreaming I did not forget my father; it was that dear good man's dream to have me become a *fine talker*. He meant by that an advocate or deputy procureur, the thing not being very clear in his mind; but he could not have any prejudices against the stage, for he didn't know what it was. I don't believe that he has ever entered a theatre in his life. My influence over him increased every year. I could not despair of making him understand that, when one is a *fine talker*, it is sometimes better to recite the fine things others have written than to declaim the nonsense one extracts from one's own mind.

Reflecting thus, I walked all about the neighborhood, through Rue Notre-Dame-des-Champs, the Luxembourg Garden, Rue de l'Ouest, Rue Vavin, and returned to shabby Rue Carnot, watching in the shadow for Oenone, whom I saw go into the house with another woman about ten o'clock. As I learned afterward, they had a very slight acquaintance with Impéria, but they were kind-hearted. All actors are, with very few exceptions. Whatever their faults, their passions, aye, their vices, their charity, their self-sacrificing devotion to one another are truly admirable. I was in a position subsequently to learn that no other profession is characterized by such fraternal compassion.

I passed the night wandering about like a ghost in the wind and rain. It was barely daybreak when I knocked timidly at No. 17. The door was opened at once, and the good concierge stood before me.

"Up already?" she said with a smile. "Upon my word, you do love her dearly, don't you? Rejoice, for she is much better. She knew her comrades. She has almost no fever at all. I have just had a little nap, and I'm going back to her. These ladies are going now and coming again at noon."

"Will you allow me to come and inquire at eleven?"

"Yes, but if she's all right, you'll let us alone, won't you?"

I went home and threw myself on my bed.

At eleven o'clock Madame Romajoux—that was the concierge's name—told me that the doctor had called. He had said:

"It will amount to nothing, we shall get out of it with nothing worse than a fright; keep her in the house five or six days and she will be all right."

When she told me that her name was Romajoux, I said to her,

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seizing a pretext to prolong the interview, that either she or her husband must be from Auvergne.

"Both of us," she replied—"And you?"

"I am from Arvers."

"We are from Volvic; that's some distance away. What's your name?"

I gave her the first name which came to me that was not my own.

"What do your people do?"

"They're peasants."

"Just as we were! But tell me, neighbor, do you mean to say that you're of our station in life and still you think of this young lady?"

"She's an actress, I am studying to be an actor, and I don't imagine she's a prince's daughter."

"That's where you're mistaken. There may be princes in her family. She's of noble birth."

"And her name?"

"I won't tell you; she keeps her name a secret. She works on the stage and at home to pay her father an allowance, for he is—incurable and in want; but enough of this, you're making me talk, and I mustn't tell what she told me in confidence. Come, forget this pretty girl. She ain't for your handsome eyes, and just suppose you should succeed in making her forget her duty; would you be very proud because you had made a fine pearl fall in the gutter? If you have any heart, leave her in peace."

"I have so much respect for her that I beg you not to mention me to her."

"Never fear! I don't want her to ruin herself, and I don't tell her about all the money I refuse and all the young sparks I turn away from the door."

"Go on, my dear countrywoman, go on! You are an adorable creature."

She began to laugh, but the time was drawing near when the doctor might surprise me there. I hurried away and went to see the rehearsal. They were just beginning to prepare for the last act and were changing the stage-setting. The actors had a quarter of an hour's rest.

"Ah! here he is!" exclaimed Madame Régine, as I entered the green-room; "just tell us, my boy, how you happen to know our Impéria."

"Know her! I don't know her," I replied; "I have never spoken a word to her."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

"But you have a fancy for her?"

"Why do you say so?"

"You offered to sit up with her as if you were her brother or—He blushes, messieurs! see how he blushes!"

"A man blushes readily and for no cause at my age, especially

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when he is catechised by a talented young lady like you."

"Thanks; you are very polite; and then?"

"And then, and then—Why, you said in my presence last night that the young lady was poor, without family, but respectable; you talked about fever and delirium. Her misfortunes and, above all, your devotion to her impressed me, touched me. I offered my services, heedless of the impropriety of my first impulse—and that's the whole of it."

She looked me in the eye, with a mischievous expression, and said:

"Is it really true that you obtained admission here among us in order to study acting?"

I was sure of myself this time, and I answered in such a way as to convince her.

The incident had no sequel. People talked about *Impéria*, they esteemed her highly, although no one outside of the theatre knew her personally; but her good breeding, her deference to advice, her modesty and her high spirit were appreciated.

"Is it true, quite true," said someone, "that she is such a star of purity as she seems?"

"I am perfectly sure of it, for my part," Madame Régine replied. "If you had seen that poor little establishment, so neat and modest and quiet! Besides, you know what Bellamare told us about his pupil?"

"Yes! she was seventeen when he brought her to us; but she is eighteen now."

"Well, that makes no difference," rejoined Régine. "Dame! I won't answer for it that when she is twenty—"

We were interrupted by the resumption of work, and they went down to the stage. I remained alone in the green-room with the leader of the orchestra, an excellent and most intelligent man, who was reading over the manuscript of the first acts to see where he would have to interpolate a bar or two of music. He was very kind and fatherly to me; I ventured to ask him who Bellamare was, and as that individual is to play an important part in my narrative, I call your attention to the details which were given me.

"Bellamare?" said the leader of the orchestra, "have you never heard of Bellamare? He is the friend of the house, a former member of this company. He played the comic parts, and he had talent too; but he talked through his nose, and his voice was not powerful enough for such an enormous stage. He has had great success in the provinces. Here the public tolerated him but would not adopt him, so that after a few years he returned to the provinces with a troupe which he recruited and trained to suit his own pleasure. He has been sometimes successful, sometimes unsuccessful in his ventures, but has always borne himself with so much delicacy of feeling and generosity, that he has won genuine esteem, and when he goes under, he always

finds friendly and trustful hands to bring him back to the surface. He has not ceased to maintain friendly relations with all of us, and he comes to see us every year about the time that we close, in order to engage those artists who are without engagements to tour the provinces with him. Those whom he can't employ himself he tells whom to apply to, recommends them and finds occupation for them all. Everybody who comes from Bellamare is sure of a cordial reception everywhere. In fact, he is an authority and a celebrity in the profession. And it just occurs to me that the very best thing you can do when you have made the most of what you see here, is to ask Bellamare for a chance to make your debut, no matter where. If you can induce him to take you into his own company, you will find in him an invaluable adviser and a teacher of the first order for serious even more than for comic parts; for if nature refused him the qualities of a successful actor, intelligence has filled the gap, and he is probably the most successful teacher in existence. He sees at a glance all that can be made of an aspirant, and when he procured an engagement for little Impéria here last winter, he said to the management: 'she will be correct, but cold this first year. I will take her again next vacation and bring her back to you improved. The third season you won't be willing to let her go, and you will give her ten thousand francs a year.'

"And meanwhile?" I asked.

"She earns eighteen hundred, which is far too little for a virtuous girl who has parents on her hands; but it is much as a debutante can hope for. Luckily she is very clever and very brave. While she is learning her parts she makes very beautiful lace which the other women here buy without haggling over the price. They know that she needs the money, and really, although their morals are not very rigid, they can't help admiring her. They know that it probably will not last; that poverty almost always ends by wearing out the will; that the time comes when the longing for rest and diversion triumphs over principle—

"Unless an honorable artist offers to marry her?"

"There's a chance of it. I'll wager that you would think of it yourself, if you had a profession and were ten years older!"

"Maestro," said I, "it is said that youth is the busy time of life."

"That is the generally received opinion."

"Well, for my part, I think that that opinion lacks common sense. Whenever anyone at my age presumes to form any sort of a plan, everybody makes haste to shriek at him: 'You are too young!'"

"Ah! do you mean that—"

"No, I have been too fully warned that a man of twenty is good for nothing!"

I left him, cursing my youthful bloom, and swearing none the less that I would cling to Bellamare as the drowning man clings to a plank.

Three days later, as I entered this same green-room, I started on seeing Impéria seated beside the fire, awaiting the end of the second

act then being rehearsed, in order to take part in the third. The poor child was still pale and weak. Her cloak was very thin, her shoes very damp. She was drying them with a calm, distraught air, her eyes fixed on the smouldering sticks on the hearth. I called Constant to revive the fire. She thanked him, unconscious of my part in the matter.

"Well," said Constant, "are you getting better? Do you know how it has changed you? Isn't this too soon for you to come out?"

"One must do one's duty, Monsieur Constant," she replied, in the pure, vibrating voice which made my heart beat fast.

She took up her work and began to make that marvellous lace work which she made so rapidly and so well. I gazed at her profile, for I dared not move so that I could see her face. She was ten times prettier by daylight than by candlelight. Her skin was of a lustrous fineness, her long brown eyelashes kissed her cheeks, her lovely light-chestnut hair fell in a braid upon her firm white neck, which was surrounded by a cloud of little curls which had escaped from restraint. She was shorter than I thought—undeniably short—but so well proportioned and so graceful that she had seemed to me almost tall on the stage; her feet and hands, her tiny ear, were masterpieces of modelling. I happened to cough, for I had narrowly escaped an attack of pleurisy as a result of passing the night out-of-doors during her illness. She turned as if surprised, and returned my bow with a movement of the eyelids, indifferent or distrustful, which seemed to say: "Who is this gentleman?" But her attention was not attracted by one new face more or less. Her eyes returned to her work, and I had no ground for hope that my infernal *lucky face* had made an impression on her.

I took my courage in both hands as they say. I pretended to be looking at the portrait of Talma, which hung by the mantel. I had drawn near to the fire; but my back was almost turned to her, and I imagined that she was preparing to move in order not to be near me. I did not choose that she should carry out that purpose, and, coughing again—this time to keep myself in countenance—I left the room by the door leading to the stage. I took a seat in the orchestra, and I heard Bocage say to the director, pointing to the *ingénue* who was then rehearsing:

"Léon, this girl won't do at all; she is impossible! At the end of the act, we shall have to give her up. Impéria would not be any more impassioned, but she would not be awkward and vulgar. Hasn't she recovered?"

"I don't think so."

"Make enquiry."

I ventured to say that Mademoiselle Impéria was in the green-room.

"Why the devil does she stay there?—My dear boy," he said to me, "be kind enough to go and say that we desire her presence here, in her own interest."

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I made but one leap from the stage to the green-room and delivered my message in such humble terms that she was astonished, and could not repress a faint smile.

"Yes, monsieur," she replied, "I will have *the kindness* to obey."

She put her work in her pocket, and went and sat down by the entrance to the stalls. Bocage greeted her with a nod, to which she replied with a bow at once dignified and respectful. With another motion of his head he summoned me, and said, passing me his fur-lined foot-warmer:

"That child is still suffering; give her this."

I almost knelt on the floor to place that bit of fur under Impéria's feet. She thanked me with the ease of a woman accustomed to such attentions, and thanked her manager with another bow. She received that act of charity as a kind-hearted princess receives the homage which is her due. I was impressed at that moment by the placid yet firm expression of her face; indeed, I was dismayed by it. She had no need to study the other actors in order to acquire noble and simple manners; she could have given them all lessons. How small and awkward I felt in her presence!

While the *ingénue* was wallowing through the last scene of the act, the impatient director, after exchanging a few words with the author, went to where Impéria was sitting.

"Take heed of the criticisms made on your comrade. The part is to be taken away from her. Be ready to rehearse it to-morrow."

Impéria made no reply, but a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Well, what is the matter?" queried the director.

"Ah! monsieur, this is the first time I have been obliged to cause pain to anyone!"

"You must get used to that, my child; it's the way of the stage!"

The next day she took the place of Mademoiselle Corinne, who declared herself her implacable enemy.

The play went more satisfactorily and more rapidly. I noticed that when it was necessary to enliven Impéria's somewhat too stately action, they always spoke to her with the greatest deference, and that, in those parts of the rôle where her good qualities manifested themselves, they applauded her warmly. Evidently they had for her a degree of consideration beyond her age and her position. She owed it to her conduct and her sweetness of manner, which inspired respect and sympathetic interest at the same time. In the green-room this secret influence made itself felt even more plainly. Actors are like children, rebellious sometimes, and fickle and ready to break everything, but they are impressionable children, acute observers, exceedingly sensitive instruments which a mere breath sets vibrating. Arrogant and cruel when they are in a disparaging mood, they are always ready to be enthusiastic, and it often happens that two irreconcilable enemies applaud each other frantically under the influence of sincere admiration. They have the freedom of judgment of irresponsible virtuosos.



Their intellectual life is a sort of go-as-you-please, pitiless or generous to excess. Being obliged to repeat the good or evil speeches which are assigned to them, they resist no impulse, infatuation no more than disdain.

Impéria, then, was appreciated, and when she found herself for the first time in full communion with the company in a new play, always a great source of excitement to those actors and actresses who *are in it* or who regret not *being in it*, they were fully satisfied as to that purity of soul and nobility of character of which they had as yet only caught a glimpse or felt a presentiment. They paid more attention to her, they forced her to talk by talking to her as she deserved to be talked to, they made it a matter of pride to tame her, and if she passed through the green-room when the conversation was a little too free in tone, the young Frontin would say:

“Hush, messieurs, here comes the angel!”

At last, seeing that she had cast aside all suspicion, I ventured to take part in general conversation with her and the other women. I always spoke to somebody else first; she was the last one to whom I ventured to speak; but destiny impelled me and those first words which I spoke to her were a declaration, in spite of myself.

The conversation had turned upon marriage, apropos of the banns of a young tragedian of the company, who was to marry a young and pretty soubrette.

“Those children are wise,” said one.

“What a crazy piece of business!” said another.

And when everyone had given his or her opinion concerning the advantages and disadvantages of a family, my friend Frontin appealed to me:

“And what does the *handsome supernumerary*, the *aspirant with a backing* think about it?”

“I am only a child,” I replied, “and I have the confiding nature of my years; I can’t understand one’s not marrying the woman whom one loves.”

“That is very pretty,” said Régine; “but as a man at your age loves all women, that would require you to take a good many marriages on your hands.”

“At my age,” I retorted wildly, addressing Impéria, who was smiling, “one loves but one woman.”

“Only one at once perhaps,” rejoined Régine; “but surely you take the first one who passes under your nose for your ideal.”

“Ideal? there is no such thing!” said the stout individual who played the financier rôles, addressing the *raisonneur*. (In the old comedies, the serious character, whose language was always dialectic and moral.)

Thereupon the *raisonneur* delivered a discourse which was evidently taken from his repertory. He had become very fluent by dint of reasoning on the stage. He said that ideality was a relative term, that

every man constructed his own ideal in his brain and embellished it with all the fascinations to which his temperament made him accessible.

"I once knew," he said, "a man of refined talent and apparently most fastidious in his tastes, whose ideal was a stout woman who was an expert cook—At your age," he continued, addressing me, "it's just the opposite; you youngsters love transparent women who live on nothing but dew."

"Don't deny it," said the *jeune comique* to me, "*a jeune premier* ought to be like that. To cut his bread in small pieces and dip them in a rose-bud for his breakfast; nothing is subtle or fragrant enough for Lindor or for Celio: nobody is less suited to household cares! Can you imagine *Cinthio del Sole* washing his brats? No, the *acceso*, the man who is always aflame, is too handsome, too clean and too beribboned to tumble into the grease of the frying pan!—What says the wise Impéria?"

"What is it?" said Impéria, for she had been paying no heed to what was said; "what are you talking about?"

"Just cast your eye on this shepherd Paris, who is gazing at you and blushing," said the *comique*, pushing me in front of her. "What do you think of him?"

"That he is very well-bred, always!" Impéria replied, without looking at me; "that is all I know of monsieur."

"That is quite true," rejoined the Frontin; "you couldn't say so much of me, could you?"

"I have no reason to complain of you or of the others."

"What a Jesuit she is! she detests me! Well, I will go into training; the aspirant shall give me lessons; I will rehearse with him the morning salutation, the manner of offering a chair, of picking up needlework when it falls and replacing the needle without dropping a stitch; for he knows how to do all that, the sly dog!"

"I could show myself even more devoted, and, it may be, without making myself ridiculous," I replied.

"Devoted unto death, eh?" observed Frontin with emphasis.

And as Impéria in her surprise looked at me at last with some attention, I repeated: "Unto death!" in a tone of passionate earnestness which startled her somewhat.

"The blow struck home!" cried Frontin; "the arrow flew straight to the heart."

"To whose heart?" she asked with heart-rending tranquillity.

"To the only heart in the company that is still free so far as I know."

"Do you mean mine? What do you know about it, Monsieur—?"

"Ah! I beg your pardon, that's another question. I did not suppose—Someone said—What creatures women are, and how the Agnèses in this world deceive one!"

"I am not an Agnès. No one tyrannizes over me."

"But Horace—"

"I don't know Horace."

"Come," interposed Régine, "tell us the truth, my dear. You are virtuous; but you're not a prude, and you haven't lived to be eighteen years old without having a preference for someone?"

I was ready to swoon, and someone called attention to my pallor; Impéria had the pitiless cruelty inherent in virtue, and she replied with a smile:

"You insist upon knowing? Very well, I have no special desire to conceal it. There is someone, far away from here, whom I love most sincerely."

I do not know whether anyone asked her any more impertinent questions, nor how she evaded them. I rushed from the room and went out to exhale my despair under the chestnuts of the Luxembourg.

What a painful wound, what a downfall, what wrath and what bitter sorrow! I can laugh to-day at the cause; but my heart still bleeds at the memory of the effect.

It was so deep that I was really frightened. Was I mad? How and why had I fallen so frantically in love with a young woman whom I had known for so few days and to whom I had just spoken for the first time? What did I know of her after all? Why had I taken it into my head to be the first man to play a part in her life and to please her at first sight?

As I was walking along the Avenue de l'Observatoire, I met Léonce, one of our *jeunes premiers*, a wild young fellow and a very poor actor, whose place I might easily have taken from him at the outset if I had been an ill-natured individual. He had a gloomy and desperate air.

"Ah! my dear Laurence," he cried, almost throwing himself into my arms, "if you knew how I am suffering!"

"What about? what's the matter?"

"She loves someone!"

"Who is she?"

"Impéria! she has just announced it openly and with an air of bravado before us all!"

"I know it, I was there."

"You were there? Oh! yes, true, the discussion arose about you; but it wasn't because of you that she spoke as she did! it was for my benefit, to deprive me of all hope."

"Do you love her then?"

"Madly!"

I had no idea of it, and therein I was no more mad than he, who believed himself to be the only aspirant. I was very careful not to open my heart to him, and I made a pretence of condoling with him, overjoyed to have someone to whom I could talk of *her*. He had loved her ever since she joined the Odéon company, he being fresh from

the Conservatoire and she from the provinces. He had made inquiries, he had been very persevering, he knew Impéria's birth and her destiny. He had made a vow that he would never betray the secrets he had surprised, and he told everything to me, whom he had known about a week, and with whom he was then conversing on familiar terms for the first time.

Impéria's real name was Nancie de Valclos. She was from Dauphiné. Her father, the Marquis de Valclos, was an intelligent, liberal-minded man, highly esteemed in his province. He adored his wife, who was very beautiful, and he personally superintended the education of his daughter, of whom he was justly proud. Madame de Valclos, who had never before given cause for the slightest breath of suspicion, had a horribly scandalous adventure with an officer of the garrison when she was forty years old. The husband killed the lover and the wife committed suicide; Monsieur de Valclos went mad after three months, having risked his whole fortune in a senseless enterprise into which he was driven by his impatience to turn all his property into cash in order to leave the country with his daughter.

"Mademoiselle de Valclos found herself an orphan to all intent at the age of twenty; for she has deceived us," observed Léonce in the midst of his narrative; "she is twenty-two years old and conceals her real age in order to use every means to conceal her identity; she could as readily make people believe that she is even younger. So perfect a face has no age—As Monsieur de Valclos," he continued, "had been defrauded when he was on the verge of mental alienation, when he was already mad in all probability, his daughter might have appealed to the courts and have recovered some vestiges at least of her patrimony. She was advised to do so, but she coldly refused. Her mother's adventure, the cause of her father's insanity, had made too much noise for her to remain in ignorance of it, and it was impossible to enforce her rights under the law without alluding to that adventure. So she allowed herself to be completely stripped, and when it became clear to her that she would not even have enough left to support her unfortunate father, she began to think about working.

"Although she had talent and education, she found no immediate employment, and she secretly formed a desperate resolution. Bel-lamare, the *impresario* and lady's man of whom you must have heard at the theatre, had given performances several times in the city in which she lived. Indeed he had, in the halcyon days of the Valclos family, managed private theatricals at the château de Valclos. He had passed several days there, he had acted himself and had superintended the debut of little Nancie, then twelve years old, before an audience of her friends and relations. He had found her so happily endowed that he laughingly remarked in her presence:

"'It's a great pity that she's rich. There's the making of an actress in her.'

"The child had never forgotten that remark. The poor girl set out

to see Bellamare, who was at Besançon. She had no need to tell him her sad story, for he knew it. He told her everything about the stage that an honest man should tell an honest girl. She was not dismayed. Indeed, it seems that her answer was:

“I am invulnerable. The memory of our misfortunes and our anguish has pierced me like a red-hot iron; I shall never be tempted to make a misstep.”

“Bellamare yielded, swore that he would be a father to her, and, preferring not to go away in her company from a place where she was known, made an appointment with her in Belgium, where she made her début under the name of Impéria, and where no one suspected the mystery of her life. In Dauphiné no one knew what had become of her. It was learned that she had taken her father to a place near Lyon and left him in charge of some old servants of his who were absolutely devoted to him and who took care of him like a child. His insanity is of a mild type, so it seems. He has entirely lost his memory, and it would be doing him no favor to restore it to him. It is supposed that Mademoiselle de Valclos has gone to Russia as a governess. No one here has discovered anything about her. The only persons who know all are Père Bocage, and myself—and I learned it all—alas! shall I confess it?—by listening at a keyhole!—You see, I am mad over her! To give her pleasure and win her, I am capable of anything; and—But all is lost! She is, she always will be virtuous, it is true, but she loves someone!”

“Who do you think it can be?” I asked Léonce, pretending to sympathize with his grief.

“Ah! who can tell?” he cried, waving his arms wildly; “she said *someone very far away!* Perhaps it is an actor she knew at Brussels, perhaps some nobleman in Dauphiné to whom she was engaged before her misfortunes.”

“If it is a nobleman, he behaves like a scoundrel in abandoning her to the hard work she is doing. He is rich doubtless, and has forgotten her! When she is quite sure of it, she will forget him too!”

“Yes; you give me a ray of hope, and I thank you; and then too I say to myself that perhaps she invented this love to put me to the proof.”

“She knows then that you love her?”

“Yes, to be sure! I wrote her to that effect some time ago, in the most persuasive manner and respectful terms.”

“Offering to marry her?”

“Yes; my father is a notary, he has some property, and I shall inherit it.”

“And will he consent to your marriage?”

“He will have to!”

“And what was Impéria’s answer?”

“Nothing at all. She has never given any sign of having received my letter.”

"Which fact does not prevent you from hoping?"

"I did hope; but now I am afraid! What do you advise me to do?"

"Nothing. Just watch her and wait."

"Then you think that I need not give her up."

"I know absolutely nothing about it."

"Let's go to dine together," he said; "you will let me talk to you about her. If I were left alone, I feel that I should do some crazy thing."

I listened to his chatter all the evening, most of the time without hearing a single word that he said to me. I considered him a presumptuous boor to aspire to Impéria's notice, and I took to myself the trivial consolation that I offered him. Heedless of the fact that I was as fatuous as he, I took pleasure in persuading myself that she had lied in order to escape Léonce's attentions, and that I was not the one whom it was her purpose to discourage.

When I saw how ridiculous Léonce appeared, I profited by his example and promised myself that I would imitate him in nothing. He did not conceal his crushing despair from anyone, and the noise he made about it had the effect of preventing anyone from making any talk about me. I assumed a very cheerful and unconcerned attitude, and, denying that I had intended to make an indirect declaration to Impéria, I claimed that I had simply expressed my views upon love and devotion in general; I succeeded in not making a fool of myself, and in turning aside witticisms at least, if not suspicions. Léonce seemed to invite the former by his idiocy, and he did me the great favor of monopolizing them.

Impéria made more or less of a hit in the new play; she acted well and was a general favorite. She did not seem in the slightest degree intoxicated by her success, and said in response to our compliments that she did not shut her eyes to all that she still had to learn in order to attain any position on the stage. Meanwhile she acquired self-possession. She mounted one rung of the ladder and seemed content. We knew that Bellamare had written to congratulate and encourage her. Mademoiselle Corinne allowed herself to be vanquished by her gentleness and her good sense, the more readily as she had been severely rebuked by everybody when she tried to slander Impéria.

The new play brought Impéria to the theatre every night. She had previously been cast for the next play, which was soon put in rehearsal. So that she passed almost all her time at work, and I was able to see her at all times; but, as I did not wish my father to believe that indolence was the cause of my change of profession, and as I did not propose to make my decision without his consent, I was careful to continue my legal studies, and I left the theatre at nine in the evening, to work at my lodgings until two in the morning. I rose late, I was at the theatre at noon for the rest of the day, excepting the dinner hour. Impéria performed the difficult task of rehearsing three or four hours during the day and acting three or four hours at night, with a change

of costume in every entr'acte. The rest of the time she made lace or studied her part at home. She did not waste an instant, and the tranquillity with which she led that terribly wearing life was something inconceivable. She was so well educated and so intelligent that every subject was familiar to her, and she talked about everything with modest ease of manner. She never seemed depressed and never gay. The discovery of her real age had allayed my excitement a little at first; not that she was any less beautiful and desirable because she was of age; but how those two years by which she had the advantage of me did hurl me back! how justly did the leader of the orchestra say that I was too young to venture to form any plans whatever for the future!

Despite this new obstacle—which was perfectly manifest to me—despite the pains I took to appear unconcerned, I soon felt that my passion was reawakening with all its former intensity; it was like a mania—a fixed idea. Léonce's insane aspirations gave me the strength to conceal my own misery, not to conquer it. I was attracted by Impéria, without her knowledge, as the moth is by the candle; I was absolutely determined to burn myself. She was superior to me by her birth and education, by the position which she had almost earned and her clearly-marked future, by her talent, still incomplete, but which I could hardly hope to equal; lastly by her age, which gave her more sense than I had, and by her experience of unhappiness, which gave her more strength and more merit.

What could I offer her? A face which people praised and which, perhaps, had no attraction for her; a small sum of money upon which we could live very humbly during the two or three years of my apprenticeship, and a fervent love which she had no reason to think lasting.

And this she made me clearly understand when she was forced to notice my intentions and to divine the emotion that lay behind my silence. I watched myself even more closely, for what I dreaded more than anything else in the world was that she should become distrustful of me, and request me never to speak to her again. I did my utmost to divert her suspicions, and no less earnestly than I had longed that she might know of my love did I labor to make her believe that she had made a mistake, or that I had abandoned my chimera. I carried my dissimulation and cowardice so far as to pay court for a moment to Mademoiselle Corinne, trembling lest she should take seriously the compliments I addressed to her. She paid little heed to them, for she was aiming at more substantial conquests. Léonce, being sternly repulsed by Impéria, tried to fool his chagrin by taking Corinne seriously. She laughed at him; and, as for me, she said to me, *in good fellowship*, that she regretted my uncertain situation, for she had no idea of marrying for love.

God knows that I had never mentioned either love or marriage to her. I had confined myself to talking about her beauty, which was problematical enough. Nevertheless, my ingenuous stratagem was

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successful. Impéria, who was in reality most ingenuous herself, allowed herself to be persuaded that I was not thinking of her, and thenceforth she talked to me with the same sweetness and trust with which she honored the others.

I was still torn between my desire to undeceive her and my dread of doing so, when it happened that she compelled me, one fine day, to set her mind absolutely at rest. We had been talking about Corinne, who allowed her name to be connected with everybody's, although she cared for nobody, and, as usual, the general conversation was interrupted by the monitor. I was left alone with Impéria for the first time.

"It seems to me that you are a little cruel to my fellow-actress," she said; "is it from spite?"

"I give you my word that it is not!" I replied.

"You men are all pitiless to women who do not respond to your flattery."

"If I should accuse Mademoiselle Corinne of anything, it would be of listening to it without responding; but of what consequence are our childish bickerings and enmities to you, who would not even allow the truth to be told you?"

"What do you mean?"

"If we should tell you of the high opinion people have of you, you would be angry. So you have no reason to fear that your temper will be tried by commonplace flattery."

Impéria did not try to embarrass me by any sentimental subtlety. She went straight to the root of the matter.

"If you think well of me," she said, "you may tell me so without offending me. I think that I have said in your presence that my heart belongs to one who is absent. I say it again, in order to put you at your ease, because, if it is true that you esteem me, you will never subject me to any trial."

I replied that I would at once demonstrate my respect by asking her to look upon me as her devoted servant.

"After the announcement you have just made," I added, "which, by the way, I had not forgotten, I think that you should see in the loyal devotion which I offer you an entire absence of impertinent curiosity and misplaced aspirations."

"What you say has the true ring," she said, offering me her hand, "and I thank you for it."

"Do you accept my devotion?"

"And your friendship, since it is entirely disinterested."

She smiled at me as she left the green-room. I remained behind and wept in silence: I had burned my ships.

One morning, during the rehearsal of the last play that was to be given before the close of the season, I found myself alone in the green-room with a man of medium height, exceedingly well-built, whose face called up one of those reminiscences to which it is impossible to



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assign a definite place. He seemed to be from thirty-five to forty years old. He had small eyes, a dark, high-colored complexion, a head which, although large and square, could not be called massive, a large mouth, short Roman nose, flat chin closely shaven, hair glued to the forehead and temples. All these combined to form the most cheerful and amiable ugliness that can be imagined. The faintest smile raised the corners of the lips in a most attractive way, and formed ill-defined dimples in the cheeks. His black eyes were bright and piercing, his jaw denoted indomitable energy of character, but his unwrinkled brow and his delicate nostrils neutralized by an indefinable touch of exquisite refinement the appetites of a bellicose and sensual nature. It was impossible not to recognize him at first glance as a comic actor of a certain class, and I was wondering whether he would not prove to be a celebrity, when he accosted me and asked if I belonged to the theatre. I came very near answering him with a burst of laughter, his voice and his nasal pronunciation were so odd; but I speedily restrained myself, for that voice was like a ray of light: I was at last in the presence of the illustrious impresario Bellamare. At the same time, by a logical sequence of ideas, I remembered his face: I had seen his photograph by Impéria's bedside.

I bowed respectfully and in three words told him about myself, expressing my desire to make my debut in the provinces at the earliest possible moment.

He looked me over somewhat as a jockey looks over a horse, walking about me, examining my feet, my knees, my teeth, my hair, begging me to take a few steps before him, but doing it all with a playful and paternal air at which I could not take offence.

"The devil!" he said, after a moment's reflection, "you would have to act very badly to avoid pleasing one-half of the public, the half that wears petticoats. You are twenty years old, you say, and are studying law? Can you dance?"

"The Auvergne boree, yes! and in addition I know all the character dances in vogue at the students' balls; but I don't intend—"

"I am not suggesting that you should dance on the stage, but to know how to dance is essential; it helps you to walk gracefully, if not with distinction. But it doesn't always make one clever on the stage. Let us see! take this cane-seated chair. Oh! with one hand, if you please; it isn't heavy. Why with the right, when it is nearer the left? You must learn to use both hands equally well. See, take the chair this way and do this!"

He took it up, placed it in the middle of the room and seated himself in it. I imagined that it was the easiest thing in the world, and that he was making fun of me, but when I tried to do the same thing, he said:

"That is not very bad, but it is very awkward. You should do it like that in the rôle of a bashful youth who is sitting down in a salon for

the first time in his life. You placed the chair so that you would naturally sit down beside it and have a most absurd fall; also you took pains to look behind you before you sat down, which is a deplorably awkward thing to do, and then you dropped suddenly, as if you were angry or tired out. The audience must not feel the motions of the actor on the stage. He should seat himself as if he had no body, for this business of sitting down is always very commonplace. Even the article of furniture provided for that purpose is a laughable thing when you think of it! The actor must make his audience forget the use of the chair and the act of using it by a bit of ingenious juggling; in tragedy everything must be dignified and noble, especially this movement, which is the most delicate and difficult of all. In comedy you must be graceful even when playing the fool. That which is neither graceful nor noble is necessarily indecent. See, look at me! this is the way you sat down."

And he imitated me so drolly that I began to laugh. Then he rose and sat again several times in different positions, revealing to me something of which none of the actors whom I had seen rehearse and act had the faintest idea: natural grace, consummate art concealed even in the least noticeable details, perfection of expression even in the most unimportant action.

"Out of ten thousand spectators," he said, "there will perhaps be three who will appreciate your sitting down in this way, and who will know that there is a whole science, the result of long study, in that simple act; but out of those ten thousand spectators, there will probably not be a single one who will not be influenced unconsciously by the ease of your most trivial movements. They will all feel that it is excellent, without knowing why, and I give you in these few words the whole mystery of the trade."

"I should be very happy," I replied, "to belong to your company and to receive lessons from you."

"That can probably be arranged," he said. "Will you be here in an hour?"

"I will be here as long as you wish."

"Very good, wait for me."

Presumably, he went at once to make inquiries about me. When we met again, Impéria was on his arm.

"I will take you," he said, "it's all arranged. Everybody speaks well of you, Mademoiselle Impéria with the rest. What do you expect to earn, my dear boy? You must know that a debutant isn't paid at a rate that will enable him to light his cigar with bank-notes."

I answered that I expected no pay until it was certain that I could be of some use to him. If I received nothing more from him than his valuable advice, I should still be his debtor.

"Undoubtedly it would be well," he said, "if all debutants realized the truth of what you say; but a man must have something to live on, something with which to dress himself decently—"

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"I have some money and clothes. I can very well wait two or three months, if my apprenticeship requires so much time."

"I see that you are an honorable fellow, and that you know Bel-lamare to be incapable of abusing your delicacy of feeling; you shall not repent of it. Come to see me to-morrow, and I will give you a short part to learn; the day after to-morrow you will come and go over it with me, but be sure to know it perfectly."

He gave me his address, and left me after shaking hands with me.

When I took my first lesson, although he treated me as indulgently as if I were his son, I was utterly dismayed by his criticism.

"Listen," he said, summing up his conclusions at the end of the lesson; "it certainly is a great advantage to be endowed physically as you are, and if you were a conceited fool, you could easily persuade yourself that you have nothing to learn. But you are an intelligent fellow, and you will understand that your physical beauty and your superb voice are quite as likely to cause failure as success. As soon as you appear on the stage, well dressed and well made up, expect a murmur of approval; but immediately thereafter the audience will be severe and distrustful. At the first words you speak, however, there will be another gentle murmur; your voice is admirable. And then? You will say your lines well, I will see to that. But a new danger! Thereafter the audience, being wide awake and on the alert, will be fearfully exacting. Man in these days, especially the Frenchman, is made like that. We are no longer living in the days when, beneath the blessed sky of southern civilization, beauty was considered almost equal to a virtue. Antiquity has handed down to us the names of artists who had no other merit than that of being beautiful. To-day no one remembers an artist without talent, though he be an Antinous or a Meleager. In our day the public demands *everything, everything*, nothing less; but what they demand least of all perhaps is plastic beauty. It has no prestige beyond the first moment. It is tiresome, it annoys, it irritates, unless there is art to give it charm, which is an altogether different thing, and which sometimes attaches to ugliness and makes it attractive and sympathetic. Modern ideas tend toward realism, and that is a step forward in a certain sense, for man was not made simply to serve as a model to the sculptor, and it is not morally advantageous to be distinguishable from other men by physical perfection alone; if he is vain, he is laughed at; if he does not make the most of it, he is considered lacking in intelligence. So that one must know *how* to be handsome, which is much more difficult than to know how to be ugly, and in our art, which consists in producing every effect personally and directly, the first point is to be perfectly certain what you are, as a preliminary to knowing what you must be.

"Well, I will tell you, speaking as an actor, a painter, and a physiologist—for I am a little of all three—what you are when you recite your part: a wine-shop Apollo, and that is all. The sparkling glance, too

bold; the exceedingly frank smile, made too convulsive by nerves saturated with alcohol; the body, supple and strong, but addicted to fanciful attitudes which lack common sense and originality; the distinct, resonant speech, full of false inflexions and seeking, by preference, the least melodious and least natural tones. You would be a detestable comic actor. You would always go too far. People would say that your wit was strained and overdone; you would have hard work in portraying *bonhomie*, and you would never be able to say in a natural tone: 'Well, how goes it?' You might have succeeded in romantic drama; but that is gone by, and the public fancy tends more and more to the bourgeois drama. If you could have rôles in which, despite the black coat, the characters you represent act always with energy and are slightly eccentric, you would be excellent; but only once or twice in his life does an actor find a rôle which is of precisely the type which he can represent to perfection. Before he becomes known he must try his hand at every sort of character, insignificant ones as well as those which are antipathetic to his nature. Thus the great point in beginning is to become supple, to efface your individuality if need be, to make yourself, in a word, fit to do everything becomingly, with no hope of winning admiration and applause for the gentleman you may be in private life. When you have got rid of yourself to some extent, of the man who was a comely student, but who had none of the elements of a tolerable actor, you can begin to look about, to invent, to create. At least three years of study, my boy, may make of you a delightful *jeune premier*. That is an excellent rôle; it demands, in addition to all the qualities that you have, all those that you have not. It is well paid, because handsome and intelligent artists are exceedingly rare. If you don't get stout, your figure will be worth a great deal. Even now your legs are worth money, and in any event your voice is invested capital; unfortunately those things are nothing, aye, worse than nothing I say again, if you make a false start. You will not be insignificant, you will be fervent; but fervor may be laughable and your passion blustering. Be on your guard against that. If you are tractable, I will save you from that danger; but if you have not a large reserve stock of sensitiveness and love of what is true, you will become cold and commonplace. To conclude, this much my conscience commands me to say to you; you will have to work terribly hard at the most exacting and most ungrateful of professions. The result may be a life of fame and fortune; it may be nothing at all, and I will not undertake to say that, three years hence, you will not be a withered fruit. The *trick of the trade*, which is indispensable, drives out originality in nineteen cases out of twenty. Reflect therefore before leaving your present profession and surroundings for the stage. You can tell me to-morrow if you feel that you have the courage to make a radical change in your individuality at the risk of becoming an absolutely discouraged, effaced, annihilated mortal!

"And think of this too: that a man can change his profession so

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long as he is walking in the beaten paths of society; whereas the man who has entered the Bohemia of the stage can never return to his previous environment. It is not because social prejudices spurn him. They are of little consequence; a man of energetic spirit triumphs over them and wins any position anywhere which he is able to fill; but after the stage, a man has no energy at his disposal. The stage consumes, exhausts, devours. People live as long there as elsewhere, on the condition that they cling to it and maintain the factitious strength, the nervous excitement, the intoxication, which are found nowhere else; once return to a life of repose, even though you have felt an imperative craving for it, and ennui gnaws at your vitals, your mind is filled with phantoms, the torpor of real life sickens you, real sentiments are confounded with the fictions of the past, the days seem like centuries, and at night, at the hour when the footlights used to blaze up to light your face and the audience hurry to their places to hang upon your words, you fancy that you are confined alive in your coffin.

“No, my boy, do not think of the stage unless you are impelled by an irresistible calling, for it is a lottery in which the prize-winners, after staking everything, are always forced to stake their lives and their hearts.

“It was my duty to say this to you. Do not think that it is called forth by the lesson we have just had. If I listened only to my own interest, I should conceal my thoughts from you, for in a very short time you will be very useful to me just as you are. Audiences are not exacting in the provinces, they are not spoiled, and you have all that is necessary for an optical success. To an actor already fledged I should make no observations; but you interest me, you attract me, and you are plunging head-foremost into the unknown: I owed you the truth.”

I thanked him warmly, and promised to reflect; but I did not reflect, I thought only of Impéria, from whom I could not bear the thought of being separated forever. I mustered all the strength of my will for a desperate undertaking, and a month later I started for the provinces with Impéria, Bellamare and the company he had collected.

So I became an actor, monsieur, I was an actor for three years, and I always bore myself like an honorable man and left the profession without a stain; but none the less I have broken with the future to which I might have looked forward, and I nearly caused my father's death from grief and disappointment, as I will tell you some other day; for I have been talking a long while and you must be tired of listening.

“By no means; go on, if you are not tired. I am curious to know the result of your passion for the charming Impéria.”

“And I intend to tell you about it, but not just now, by your leave. While I take a breathing-spell, I will make a sketch of the waterfall.”

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“Very good. But just a word: what is the *horrible scrape* which certain good souls of the neighborhood lay at your door?”

“Why, don’t you know? I have been an actor, and, in their view, that is more than enough to damn a man.”

## II

When Laurence had sketched and mused a little, as if he felt it necessary to collect his memories, he resumed his narrative:

I was not to see my father until the vacation, and I had three months of liberty before me. I wrote him that I proposed to travel with a friend for the improvement of my mind. That brief explanation satisfied the dear old man. Being entirely unfamiliar with every sort of study, and ignorant of the mechanism of society in any other sphere than his own, he was perfectly ready to believe that I proposed to work while I travelled, as I told him of my resolution to think unremittingly of my future.

Before taking you with me in my wandering life, I must introduce you to the principal persons with whom I cast my lot. Some left Paris with us, others we picked up on the road.

Bellamare’s inseparable companion and perhaps his best friend, at the same time that he was his very antipode in character and aspect, was a man whose strange story deserves to be told. He went by the name of Moranbois, but his real name was *Hilarion*, although he was the least hilarious of all men on earth. He had never known any family. He had been a foundling and had tended swine for a peasant who beat him and starved him. Being kidnapped, half willingly, half forcibly, by passing showmen, he had proved to be of no use in entertaining the public; he had soon been left behind on the high road, where an Auvergnat peddler had picked him up and made him carry his pack. That trade suited him; he was decently fed, he loved to travel, and the Auvergnat was not a bad fellow. It happened that Hilarion was a good boy, very patient, submissive and faithful. The Auvergnat had but one defect: he was an inveterate drunkard, and very often the weight of his merchandise was too much for him and he scattered it along the road. Hilarion, with a little practice, became a packhorse able to carry the whole of his master’s impedimenta. Moreover, as he was a good-hearted youth, he did not forget the drunkard when, as was frequently the case, he took long naps on the turf by the roadside. When he began to stagger or to rave, the boy would prudently lead him into the fields, where he was in no danger of quarrelling, and out of reach of thieves. He kept watch over captain and cargo; he combined the functions of the horse and the watch-dog.

The Auvergnat began to be much attached to Hilarion and gave him an interest in his profits. The child might in that way have earned

and saved something; but when his master was thirsty, he borrowed his share and forgot to repay him. It is true that Hilarion forgot to ask for it.

This friendship and connection lasted for a long while; Hilarion was twenty years old when the Auvergnat died of dropsy in a hospital, leaving a little money which his young partner turned over to the heirs without taking out anything to pay for his services. They were poor peasants with a large family, and he had not the heart to ask them for anything. He left them, having given no thought to the question of what was to become of him. He had become so accustomed to seeing other people pay no heed to the future that he had fallen into that habit. He was already a misanthrope, for he had neither seen nor known any good people in his life, except possibly his drunken Auvergnat, who did not maltreat him, but who did not reward him either. However, he had no disposition to reproach his memory. That man had taught him to read and write as far as he was able; also the use of his fists to some slight extent, in order to defend himself at need. He had developed his physical strength, his coolness in danger, his aptitude for a wandering life. As he walked along, alone and without a settled plan, Hilarion reflected that a fearless, strong man, of sober habits, cannot die of hunger, even in the midst of selfish men.

He was mistaken. One must have some capital, however small it may be. No sort of toil can dispense with the instruments of toil. Hilarion had not the means with which to purchase a skein of thread. He did not know how to use his empty hands, but one day, after forty-eight hours of fasting, as he happened to cross the public square, he saw a sort of Hercules, who was flooring all the infantry of the garrison one after another, and it occurred to him that his fists might be of some service. It seemed to him that the athlete was rather tricky than strong, and, after watching him for a while, he offered to try a bout with him. But, while betting on his own victory, he informed the bystanders that he was dying of hunger and thirst.

"Eat and drink," said the street-corner Alcides. "I don't *fell* those who *fall* of themselves."

A hasty collection provided the newcomer with the means of swallowing a bit of bread and a glass of wine; after which he went down into the arena.

It was really an arena, the Roman Circus at Nîmes; and when Hilarion Moranbois used to tell the story, he would say that, when he saw for the first time that vast, beautifully proportioned monument, although he did not know what it was—although he had not the slightest idea of the past, the faintest notion of history—he felt as brave and strong as ten thousand men.

The professional Hercules was *felled* by the improvised Hercules. The next day he demanded his revenge. Hilarion had dined well, the "sports" of the neighborhood having commemorated his triumph at the tavern. He won another victory, and such a brilliant one that

other itinerant wrestlers were summoned to try conclusions with him. He *felled* them all, and was regularly employed, his compensation being fixed at one-third of the receipts. However, he soon left the troupe, because it was proposed to him that he should allow himself to be *felled* by a masked man who was no other than the Hercules whose place he had taken. They offered to pay him handsomely if he would take part in that comedy, which always succeeds with the public and was certain to be profitable. His self-esteem triumphed over his pocket. He refused scornfully, lost his temper, thrashed his manager, burst his bass-drum with his fist, was forced to pay a hundred times what it was worth, took to his heels and went to Arles, where he had been told that he would find other arenas. Clearly he had a taste for classic ruins.

On the road he fell in with Mademoiselle *Plume-au-Vent*, who danced a combination of the *tarantella* and the *mont ferrine*, accompanying herself with a tambourine and triangle with much skill; she was his first love. They appeared together in several small towns, one of which came near being fatal to him.

On the evening of his arrival, just after he had exhibited his talents on the public square, he was stealthily beckoned to by a soubrette, who led him through a labyrinth of dark streets to a house of respectable appearance surrounded by gardens. There a thin, dark woman, with a keen, imperious eye, addressed him thus:

"Will you enter my service as assistant gardener? You will have nothing to do; you can sleep all day, and at night you will keep watch quietly in the garden. I am pestered by an officer of the garrison, who is wild with love of me, and threatens to abduct me. He is a madman, a perfect demon, who is capable of doing what he threatens to do, and he is very strong, I warn you. My servants are cowards, bribed by him, probably, and you can see that, being quite alone in this isolated house, I can expect no help from without. So fall upon that man if you see him prowling under my windows, or in my grounds at all. Do not kill him, but treat him so that he will have no inclination to return. For each time that you give him a lesson of that sort you shall receive a hundred francs."

"But suppose he is stronger than I am—suppose he kills me?" queried Hilarion.

"Nothing venture, nothing have," replied the lady.

"That is true enough," thought the wrestler.

And he accepted.

Eight nights passed, and not a leaf in the garden stirred; the gravelled paths made no sound. On the ninth night, in the bright moonlight, an officer whose appearance answered the description which had been given to Hilarion, opened a gate to which he had the key, and walked towards the house without taking the slightest precaution. Hilarion was exceedingly loath to jump upon him without warning. He was foolish enough to warn him that he would get into trouble if



he did not take his leave at once. The unknown laughed in his face, called him a fool, and threatened to toss him into the melon beds if he interfered with him. Hilarion could not brook such language and attacked him. The visitor's impatience had made him angry, and the stout defence he encountered made it impossible for him to spare him. Hilarion tossed him among the artichokes, and left him lying there so done up that he thought that he was dead. He hastened to tell the lady of the house, who came with her maid and a candle to see what had happened.

"Wretch, what have you done?" she cried; "you have murdered my husband, who has just returned from a journey! Begone, and let me never hear of you again!"

Hilarion was struck dumb with amazement.

"Demand your hundred francs," whispered the soubrette hurriedly. "*She* knew perfectly well that it was monsieur! She is disgusted with you for not killing him outright."

Hilarion was so horrified to find that he had committed a crime when he thought that he was performing the duty of a faithful servant, that he refused to claim anything and fled, swearing that he would never be taken in again.

At Arles he found Mademoiselle *Plume-au-Vent*, who had already formed a partnership with an Alsatian giant and an alleged Lapland dwarf. He did very well there; but he had reached the age of conscription, and he drew number one. He served seven years in Algeria and was the better for it. He finished his education there, that is to say he learned French and Arabic, and as he could write very well and was good at figures, as he was an excellent soldier, neat and prompt and fearless, his comrades, who were fond of him despite his roughness, thought that he would be promoted. But he was not; on the contrary, notwithstanding his good behavior and his strict attention to duty, he was struck from the rolls for insubordination. It should be said that he detested his superiors, whoever they happened to be, and was lacking in respect to them. Although he submitted to the regulations, he could not tolerate personal control when it seemed to him to overstep the strict limits of authority or not to be scrupulously observant of them. A critical spirit, very extraordinary in a man so low in the world, and very unfortunate in his position, had developed in him and bade fair to become his leading characteristic, an obstacle to his future progress. He had more punishments than rewards, and when he had served his term, having nothing to hope from a re-enlistment, he returned to France as friendless and empty-handed as he had gone away.

While with the regiment he had practised assiduously all kinds of gymnastics and had been first in all. He did not like the profession of gymnast however, and the prospect of resuming his open air exhibitions was not attractive to him. For several years he was a porter about the wharves at Toulon, a *homme de peine*, as they are called, a pitiful

expression which well describes a hard and dismal existence. We do not realize what a dangerous and fatal gift great muscular strength is. Man exploits everything, and Hilarion's exceptional strength laid him open to all sorts of exploitation. He was *sounded* by thieves and almost enlisted, without his knowledge, in schemes of murder. Having his eyes opened in time, he became in the end extremely distrustful, conceived the utmost horror of malefactors and was inclined to detect them everywhere; his misanthropical humor increased, and as, in the midst of his depression and weariness, he reflected more than men in his wretched plight often do, he became a sort of Diogenes. Alone in life as he was, he intensified his loneliness by his habits and his thoughts.

Being absolutely unselfish, careless of the morrow and indifferent to his own interests, he derived no benefit from anything, even from his noble deeds. He distinguished himself several times by saving lives, and received several medals, but it never occurred to him to ask for assistance, nor would he seek to profit by any chance connection or accept the slightest reward. He was accustomed to say that, as he did not love the human race, he risked his life only for the pleasure of testing his muscles and keeping himself in condition. Some Southerners, who met him later in civilized society, remembered that strange, untamable creature whom they had known as a porter at Toulon, and whom they had sometimes employed because of the curiosity aroused by his character. Silent, reserved, distraught, his glance was always stern and distrustful, his speech bitter, often insulting and always cynical, his manner defiant; and suddenly a disdainful tranquillity would succeed the attitude of menace. Everything was a subject of irritation to him, and speedily became a matter of contempt or indifference.

One fine day he fell in with a deserted child, who clung to his coat. He was a pretty little fellow, whom Hilarion's sour face did not frighten although he was very cowardly. Touched by this mark of confidence, or struck by such eccentricity, he took the child to his hovel, cared for him and brought him up after his fashion, but was entirely unsuccessful in modifying his lazy, cowardly, boastful instincts. That vain, weak creature, who was no other than the *jeune premier* Léonce, whom I mentioned in the early part of my story, became Hilarion's tyrant. The most savage man apparently craves the domination of some secret compassion; to gratify Léonce, to procure playthings and new clothes for him, to rescue him from the mockery and brutal treatment of other children, in a word, to watch over him and have him always by his side, Hilarion left the wharves and burden bearing of Toulon and resumed his former profession of wrestler, his life of adventure, his spangled short-clothes, his tinsel diadem and his former sobriquet of *Coq-en-Bois*.

Under these circumstances he *worked* one day, ten years ago, in the presence of Bellamare whom chance had brought to the fair at

Beucaire. His scowling face, his hoarse voice, his strange pronunciation certainly did not attract the *impresario*, and he could only admire the power of the biceps; but the next day as Bellamare was driving away from the town, he met the Hercules, also going away with Léonce on his shoulders: Léonce, who was ten or twelve years old, but too great a prince to travel otherwise than on somebody else's back. Hilarion Coq-en-Bois remembered that he himself had carried a pack at an age when he would gladly have been carried himself, and as he was not conscious of having intellectual charm or seductive sweetness of disposition to entertain his ward, he did for him all that he could, all that he knew how to do; he spared him all physical fatigue and fatigued himself in his stead: was he not born to be a *homme de peine*?<sup>9</sup>

As Coq-en-Bois, absorbed by such philosophical reflections as these, reached a place where the road ascended, he saw a cabriolet in front of him, just grazing the edge of the cliff in a very disquieting way. He concluded that the driver was asleep, and quickened his pace; but before he could reach the carriage the horse took fright at a goat and shied first to the right, then to the left. It was all up with Bellamare, for the driver of his hired carriage had dropped the reins when he fell asleep. Luckily Coq-en-Bois had hastily set down his burden, had hurried to the spot and had seized one wheel with his herculean fist. The horse, who had already lost his footing, fell over the cliff alone, both shafts having fortunately broken clean off with the traces. The carriage, with Coq-en-Bois for a drag, rolled away from the edge, and Bellamare, leaping to the ground, saw that one of his savior's hands had been torn in the incredible effort he had just put forth, at the risk of being involved in the disaster.

Thus their friendship began. They travelled together to Lyon, and the wrestler, being pressed by questions, told his story. The modest shyness with which he told of the heroic acts of his life, that indefinable touch of grandeur and triviality combined, which revealed at every word his noble but soured character, made a profound impression on the artist.

It was a fad of Bellamare's to discover new types and perfect them; he fancied, not unreasonably, that a man so impervious to fatigue, so resigned to all possible eventualities, so resolute and so reserved, so suspicious and so incorruptible, would be an invaluable factotum for him and his company. Coq-en-Bois—hereafter we will call him *Moranbois*, for the first thing Bellamare did was to find a decent name for him, the sound of which would not be too new and strange to his ears—Moranbois had but one really intolerable defect, the coarseness of his language. He promised to correct it, and he was never able to keep his word, but he displayed in Bellamare's service so many priceless qualities, probity, devotion, courage, practical intelligence, that the *impresario* could never make up his mind to part with him. He even carried his friendship so far as to try to make an artist of Léonce.

He was able to make of him nothing more than a pretty brainless boy, with a little wit rubbed off others, and a more than mediocre actor; but he procured engagements for him in the provinces, even in Paris, where he still vegetates in colorless rôles. I do not need to tell you that that self-centred person thinks that he is the victim of unjust treatment, that he accuses every manager of sacrificing him from jealousy of his popularity with the ladies, and finally, that he has absolutely forgotten the paternal devotion of Moranbois, that he doesn't care a fig for him, and wouldn't remember that he owes everything to him even if he should see him lying in the gutter. That race of ingrates whose ingratitude is due to folly is much in evidence in dramatic life; but do we not encounter it elsewhere also? It is my opinion that it abounds everywhere.

Moranbois as Bellamare's confidential man soon found that his time was not sufficiently employed by travelling as advance agent to hire theatres, arrange for lodgings, haggle with hotel-keepers, vintners, lamp-dealers, hairdressers and scene-shifters, ordering posters, arranging for transportation, etc. He was determined to make himself useful to the full limit of his strength, and one fine day Bellamare's company screamed with laughter on hearing the ex-tinker's boy, exporter, ex-wrestler declare that he was healthy enough to act in addition to his other functions. Offended by the hilarity of his auditors, he called all the actors stop-gaps, faint hearts and mountebanks—I soften the epithets materially.

They were used to his outbreaks and laughed all the more. He lost his temper in good earnest and boasted that he could play the part of a brigand in melodrama better than anyone.

"Why not?" said Bellamare. "Learn a part, rehearse it to me and we will see."

Moranbois tried, and struck the bass note of the part in a most satisfactory fashion; but he lacked originality. Bellamare suggested ideas to him and taught him to take advantage of his natural defects. As he was perfectly docile with that ingenious and persuasive master, Moranbois became a brigand with whom the provinces were very well satisfied. He did not interfere with the success of the company and he pleased the gallery. His success did not intoxicate him however, and he consented to fill the most trivial rôles in plays in which he had no regular assignment. He never considered that he lowered himself by representing a thief, a peasant, a drunkard, a workman, with only three lines to say in one short scene, or even by donning a livery and delivering a letter. This humility was the more touching in that he had the secret conviction that he was a great actor, a mistaken but ingenuous satisfaction, which did not make him any the prouder; and Bellamare was grateful to him therefor.

But I have not yet told you the most peculiar result of the association between an exquisitely refined and well-read man like Bel-

lamare, and the knotty, unhewn creature, always impossible in manners and language, whose portrait I am drawing for you. Bellamare, who observes and takes note of everything, while he seems to notice nothing, discovered that Monsieur Hilarion Moranbois was a very perspicacious and sure critic. When he took him to the various theatres in Paris, he was impressed by his criticism of the plays, by his keen judgment of the actors. He took him through the museums to see if he had eyes for anything off the stage; Moranbois instinctively halted in front of the works of the masters and warmly admired the Greek statues and Roman busts. He was unable to describe the ideal and the realistic; but he realized the difference between them after his fashion, and Bellamare saw that he understood perfectly.

He consulted him concerning the spirit that inspired ancient monuments, and their meaning, and concerning the art of scene-painting, and found him full of ideas and originality. Moranbois's special faculty was revealed. He was above all things the man of quick perception, the ideal adviser. When he saw a rehearsal in Paris, where he followed his manager about, step by step, he would whisper to Bellamare in ten words, often brutal and unseemly words, just what parts of the play would fall flat, what parts of the play would make a hit, and what its final fate would be. He never made a mistake. He was in his single person the pulsating, sensitive public, ingenuous and corrupt, generously responsive to every honest effort, pitiless to the slightest relaxation, always ready to laugh or weep, but implacable when it is bored. He was instinct personified; still shy and retiring in his maturity, he was as it were the thermometer of the multitude. What author high on the ladder of literary fame would ever have thought of consulting that man with the long aquiline nose, the high brow strewn with infrequent hairs, the long convex face, the hollow, tanned cheek, the small, sunken, bright but listless eye, that depressing individual in the threadbare coat, the Scotch plaid waistcoat, the string cravat, the gnarled gloveless hands, who stood in a corner with the scene-shifters, and whom one would have taken for the least attentive of idlers? And if someone had said to one of that select company of men of letters: "Yonder poor devil, who listens to you and passes judgment on you, is an ex-mountebank who used to balance a cartwheel on his chin and juggle with solid cannon-balls; but go and ask him for his opinion and follow it, for he is the incarnation of the public by whom you will be hissed or borne in triumph!"—imagine the surprise, the disdain perhaps, of the masters of the craft!

Bellamare consulted Moranbois as an oracle, and the oracle was infallible. I have told you this long story, I have given you all these details which form a too convenient digression in my narrative, in order to give you an idea of the intellectual Bohemia called the stage, which is recruited from every rung, consequently from both extremities of the social ladder. The most divergent destinies, the most dissimilar trainings, the most diametrically opposite faculties seem to be

carried thither, as the tide heaps up at random on a reef all sorts of debris. The thing that is built there with a whole world of vanished passions, disappointed ambitions, spontaneous productions, ardent dreams, dull despair, unconquerable forces, mental melodies, marvellous fruits, and inspirations mad, senseless or sublime, is the fairy palace called dramatic art, the sanctuary, open to all the winds that blow, of grand and inspiring or paltry fiction. It is something as ephemeral as a dream, as confused as a street riot, in which everything false is harnessed to the presentment of the true, in which the gorgeous colors of the sunset and the azure hue of night are electric lights, the trees are painted canvas, the mist a sheet of gauze, the rocks and pillars water-color; you know all this, you know all the artifices, you divine all the tricks; but what you do not know is the phantasmagoria of the moral world, which like all the rest lives a factitious life there. That bent old man with the quavering voice and lifeless eye, who every evening causes thousands of spectators to ask: "Where in Heaven's name did they pick up that old fellow who plays an octogenarian without making up for the part, and who still has his memory?"—is a youth of twenty-five who has all his teeth and hair, who is rosy-cheeked and active, and whom his mistress expects as soon as he has rubbed off his wrinkles and stretched his false bald skull on a wooden block. He straightens himself up and sings in a robust voice as he goes down the stairs four at a time. His old man's rôles sit lightly upon him, and his gayety is not impaired—You have marvelled at the contrast between him and that handsome, all-conquering hero whose blazing eye and mellow voice express passion or triumphant gallantry. Alas! it is forty years since he was young, and his loves cost him very dear—That excellent comic actor who makes you laugh until your sides ache, is a despairing wretch who contemplates suicide, or who drinks himself drunk in order to forget himself. That servant of the third class, whose classic rôle consists in receiving kicks in the back, is a scholar who is engaged in very important archaeological investigations, or a man of letters who is collecting rare books. That other, who plays the tyrants or the traitors, is a paterfamilias who takes his children into the country whenever he has a day's leave. Here is another who paints charming pictures, and who plays the grocers' parts; another, who plays the leaders of the first society, princes and dukes, has a mania for chess or for fishing; others are sportsmen, oarsmen, pianists, mechanics or Heaven knows what! And these ladies? This one is a courtesan and plays innocent maidens to perfection; that other is a respectable mother of a family and plays the courtesans' parts with superior skill; this one, whose diction is wonderfully refined and pure, can hardly read her lines and doesn't understand the first word of them; that one speaks her lines wretchedly and seems to lack intelligence, yet she is exceedingly well educated and might keep a boarding-school. Here is a rigid and unbending duenna, who is noted for telling indecent stories; and there a plump, bold-faced peasant and

a wanton soubrette—hush! they are both ultra devotees, perhaps two of the mystic doves of Père *Trois-Etoiles*, who makes a specialty of stage conversions.

Thus all is contrast, vain show, deliberate falsehood in the mock existence of the stage. Sometimes too the actor becomes incarnate in the character he represents and never lays it aside. A man who used to care for nothing but billiards and his pipe becomes a profound politician because he has acted real historical characters; another who fancied that he was a radical republican becomes a conservative because he has played the financiers' parts. Thus the contrast sometimes disappears; fiction and reality become so blended in the man that he who is entitled to a Montyon prize for virtue would renounce the profession rather than consent to represent a bad action on the stage; sometimes again the contrast becomes manifest and reaches its climax, so that the unselfish man may excel in portraying the character of Shylock.

I once had a fellow-actor who had been a Trappist monk for several years, and who told me some strange and romantic things concerning the interior of convents. It seems that monastic life also is a reef upon which the most diverse castaways of human society are tossed up, and in which the caprices of destiny are exhibited to almost as great an extent as on the stage; but everything fades away there and ceases to exist, the brutalizing regulations soon put an end to all eccentricities. On the stage nothing blends, everything stands out in relief, personal characteristics become more and more apparent. There are special rôles for everyone, and I who tell you this have been a peasant, a student, an actor, a peasant again, perhaps forever, but a peasant henceforth in spite of himself. In what social series am I to be reckoned? All those who have been in the convent or on the stage are, with rare exceptions, unclassed forever.

Let us return to Bellamare's company. He had at that time a *grand premier* who cost him a great deal of money and caused him a great deal of annoyance. He put up with him because he hoped that I would be able to take his place at the end of three months. This man, who was no longer young but still had his share of good looks, did not lack talent; unfortunately he had a mania for not admitting that anybody else possessed any. He rehearsed like an amateur, never emphasizing his *effects*, because he was so intent upon watching for those of his fellows, in order to neutralize or destroy them. In the provinces we often cut the text of the plays we gave. To suit the capabilities of such performers as one is forced to depend upon, or to spare the susceptibilities of the local audience, passages are omitted which would not be understood at all or misunderstood, scenes which would necessitate unobtainable scenery, and whole rôles which there is no one to fill. These *cuts*, sometimes ingenious, sometimes absurdly incongruous, according to the genius of the manager, very often pass unnoticed. Lambesq, our leading man, had but one idea in his head,

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and that was to efface all the parts except his own. In a scene with three characters he would insist on having the lines of two of them assigned to him; in one with two only, he would insist upon delivering both questions and answers himself. I shall always remember the ninth scene in the third act, of the *Mariage de Figaro*, where Suzanne's sweetness and grace made him angry. In that scene, where the dialogue consists of brief, hurried sentences, he declared at the rehearsal that Mademoiselle Anna did not reply fast enough, and that his part dragged proportionately. He proposed therefore in all seriousness to modify it thus; but first let me tell you how it is written.

SUZANNE (out of breath).

Monseigneur! pardon me, monseigneur!

ALMAVIVA.

What is it, mademoiselle?

SUZANNE.

You are angry!

ALMAVIVA.

You seem to seek something?

SUZANNE.

My mistress has the vapors. I came to beg you to lend us your phial of ether. I shall bring it back in an instant.

ALMAVIVA.

Nay, nay, keep it for yourself; it will soon be of use to you.

Lambesq conceived the idea of not letting Suzanne say a word. The moment she left the wings he took the words out of her mouth, crying:

"What is it, mademoiselle? I am angry as you see! Your mistress has the vapors! She wishes me to lend her my phial of ether! Very good, here it is; but do not bring it back, keep it for yourself, it will soon be of use to you."

The whole scene, which covers four pages, was to be converted thus into a monologue.

"And why not?" said Lambesq; "Almaviva is a rake, therefore he's not a fool. He knows very well that Suzanne has invented some absurd pretext for coming to him. That pretext is madame's nerves. Then he always has a phial of ether about him, so he divines that she has come to borrow it. But he has one surprise in the course of the scene: that is when Suzanne gives him some hope; but is it necessary



for Suzanne to speak? Her eyes, her smile, her pretended confusion are sufficient, are they not, for the lover to interpret and translate? See how well this goes!"

And he recited the latter part of the dialogue thus:

"If you would consent to listen to me! Is it not your duty to listen to MY Excellency? Why, cruel girl, did you not tell me sooner? But it is never too late to tell the truth. You will go to the garden at twilight; do you not walk there every evening? You were so harsh to me this morning! To be sure, the page was behind the chair! You are right, I forgot that!—But let us understand each other, my heart: no assignation, no dowry, no marriage! You say NO MARRIAGE, NO SEIGNIORAL RIGHTS? Where does she hear these things that she says? By my soul, I shall go mad over her! But your mistress awaits this phial, lovely creature; I would kiss you—But someone comes!—She is mine!"

Thus unceremoniously did Lambesq deal with Beaumarchais and other dramatists, ancient and modern, when he entered a company in which he had elbow room. Bellamare refused to allow it, and he considered Bellamare a pig-headed, foolish slave of routine. He lost his temper, sulked, spoiled the rehearsals, and when the time for the performance came, no one knew what mad freak he would indulge in to put himself forward and *sound* the recalcitrant spectator by a persistent *underlining* of words, glances and gestures, which did not always meet with approval, but which compelled all his bewildered comrades to allow him to monopolize the *effect*.

Another leading man, who played the lovers, the *raisonneurs* and the traitors at will, was Léon, who resembled Léonce only in name. Léon was handsome, good, noble-hearted and generous. He loved his art and understood it, but he did not love the profession, and he was habitually depressed. He felt that he was made to display his intelligence in a loftier way than by the recital of other men's words. He wrote plays which we sometimes gave, and which were not devoid of merit; but a bilious sort of timidity, if I may so describe it, a self-distrust which acted as a dead weight upon him, prevented him from making the most of himself. He was of a good family, and he had been well educated. A dispute with his parents had driven him to the stage. He was a great favorite there, very useful and very highly esteemed; but he was not happy anywhere, and he lived wholly within himself. I worked hard to win his friendship and succeeded; I do not know if I have retained it.

Mademoiselle Régine, who had played second and third rôles at the Odéon from time to time, was one of us, and played the leading parts in the provinces. She was Phèdre, Athalie and Clytemnestre. She was neither young nor beautiful, she lisped a little too much and

lacked stateliness; but she had animation and audacity, and won applause by main force. She was a good-hearted creature, of somewhat doubtful morals, of a generous nature and an inexhaustible gayety, with a hearty appetite and an iron constitution; she was very devoted to Bellamare and a good comrade to both of us, making herself useful and agreeable to all, but inclined to work us all a little on occasion.

Isabelle Champlein, called Lucinde, played the leading coquette. She was very beautiful, except that her nose was too long. That nose would have prevented her from ever obtaining an engagement in Paris; physical imperfections condemn many really talented artists to the provinces forever. Lucinde was no ordinary person. She understood her parts, she had a beautiful voice, she spoke her lines well, she dressed handsomely and with taste. She was kept by a wealthy owner of vineyards, who, having a wife in Bourgogne, could not live with her; and she was faithful to him, as a matter of prudence, as well as from love of her art and her personal appearance. She was bent upon retaining her rich voice, her beautiful figure and her wonderful memory. Honest and stingy, cold and selfish, she neither helped nor harmed other people. She was very assiduous in performing her duties at the theatre. It was impossible to find any fault with her conduct, but she haggled shrewdly over the terms of her engagement, and exacted a very high salary.

We had a pretty soubrette, as mischievous, alert and active as a sky-rocket on the stage. In private life Anna Leroy was a sentimental blonde who read novels and was always in the throes of some painful passion. She was in love sometimes with Lambesq, sometimes with Léon, sometimes with me. She was so sincere and so sweet that I never pretended to be in love with her. I respected her, but Léon despised her because Lambesq had compromised her and humiliated her. She lived in tears, awaiting a new passion which inevitably added one to her long tale of disappointments and lamentations.

Thus the men's parts were taken by Bellamare, Moranbois, Lambesq, Léon and myself; the women's parts by Régine, Impéria, Lucinde and Anna. A dresser who acted in that capacity for them all, and who was known as La Picarde, played the silent parts or those with three or four words only. I must not omit to mention the man who performed the same functions for us, and who had been for a long time in Bellamare's service as valet off the stage. He bore the strange nickname of *Purpurin*, and was generally dubbed *Purpurino Purpurini*, a noble Venetian. This witticism, the origin of which I do not know, nor did he, had become a solemn fact in his mind. Having never known any other relation than a great-uncle who had been, he said, deputy assistant hostler in Louis the Sixteenth's stables, he had persuaded himself, by a sequence of ideas rather difficult to follow, that he might be of Venetian descent and of patrician birth. Bellamare used to describe in a most entertaining way Purpurin's extraordinary ideas on every subject, but never attempted to explain them. The man

amused him, he said, by dint of trying his patience, and he had the faculty of surprising him constantly by some absurd freak which it was impossible to anticipate, by some whim impossible to define. In fact, he was a consummate fool, three-fourths mad, running over with self-esteem and with contempt for those who were below him. He had but one virtue, his affection for Bellamare, and his willingness to share his ill-fortune at need, with a superstitious faith in his ultimate destiny.

"Monsieur Bellamare," he would say, "must have been just what he is—that is to say a man of spirit and genius—to induce me, who have served in the greatest families of Faubourg Saint-Germain, to enter the service of an actor, yes and a republican, me, a legitimist by inheritance."

If anyone had observed that, being a Venetian by birth, he should have been a republican on principle, he would have been very much surprised, and would have replied by some argument drawn from the history of China or the Apocalypse, for he never stopped halfway, and his replies made such long strides in his vivid imagination that one stopped half-way oneself when arguing with him.

"He always closes my mouth by the unexpected direction his brain takes," said Bellamare. "One day when I asked him why he brought me blue stockings in which to act Figaro, he answered that braided hair was becoming to Monsieur Lambesq. Another time I was complaining of a sick headache and he declared it was the barber's fault for shaving me badly. And that's the way it always is with him, like the game of *scandal*."

Purpurin made himself useful on the stage none the less; he played the ninnies, and played them so entirely wrong, assuming the knowing air which was natural to him to represent the artless foolishness of his part, that he succeeded unconsciously in being very amusing. He always displayed to the audience the same face, the face of a fool, that is to say his own, and the audience never suspected the entire ingenuousness of the performance. They thought that Purpurin was the creator of that burlesque type and found him very entertaining.

You will imagine perhaps that a triumph won so cheaply satisfied Purpurin's self-love. Not at all; he was comical without effort, and he had a profound contempt for his line of parts. He had a passion for poetry, dreamed of nothing but tragedy and tragic rôles. He tormented Bellamare and Moranbois to allow him to recite Théramène's long speech, and I must say that that speech in his mouth would have caused a *fièvre*, for it is impossible to imagine anything more astounding and better adapted to drive dull care away.

Bellamare's company was very eccentric. We played a little of everything, melodrama, society plays, vaudeville, and classic tragedy and comedy. The repertory was extensive and was replenished on the instant with incredible ease. Being thoroughly familiar with the provincial field and with the tastes of the different cities, Bellamare was

wonderfully successful in his selection of the works to be given before our widely varying audiences. Certain places care for nothing but tearful or hair-raising melodrama; certain others will have nothing but burlesques; others again must have new works, the latest hits *from the capital*; and others are classical to the core and insist upon Alexandrines.

Bellamare exacted from the members of his troupe, first of all, facility in learning their rôles, and docility in the matter of the *mise en scène*. He knew that it is impossible to produce in the provinces a company composed of the élite of the profession; but he knew also that the quality that is most frequently lacking in travelling companies is *ensemble*, and he made it his prime object to obtain that quality; the result was that, with actors of moderate parts, he succeeded in giving plays which were perfectly learned and well acted.

We began our tour at Orléans, and it was there that I made my début before a small and unsympathetic audience. I was not very much disheartened however; Impéria was not there. She had left Paris before us, to pay a visit to her unfortunate father, I presume: she was not to join us until two days after our opening performance.

It was a very great gratification to me to be able to make my first adventure in the absence of that judge, of whom I stood in greater dread than of all the rest of the world. I appeared too in a part of trifling importance, a young lover in a play by Monsieur Scribe. I needed nothing more than a little good looks and good breeding; and, thanks to Bellamare, I was very presentable in that respect; but I felt very cold, and in the second act my blood fairly froze in my veins when I saw Impéria's sweet refined face looking at me from the wings; she had just arrived, and knowing how deep an interest Bellamare had taken in me, she was interested in my début. She was listening, she was studying me closely; nothing about me could possibly escape her scrutiny. A cloud passed before my eyes, which probably became haggard and lifeless. I felt as if I were standing in a flood of light, although the place was not brilliantly lighted, and I longed to take refuge in some shaded spot where my faults would be less glaring. The fear of being ridiculous paralyzed me, and at the moment when I ought to have shown some passion, I felt so awkward and so helpless that I had a frantic longing to rush into the wings; I have no idea how I finally got there, and whether I shortened my part. I was on the point of swooning, and I staggered like a drunken man. Bellamare was just going on the stage, he had barely time to say to me as he passed:

"Courage! you are doing well!"

"No, I am doing very ill," I said to Impéria, who put out her hand as if to support me; "tell me, am I not wretched, wretched beyond words?"

"Nonsense!" she replied, "you are timid, that's all; much more timid than I supposed you would be, or than you yourself expected probably. It's always like that, but it passes away as you get used to the

stage.”

My confusion had passed unnoticed by the audience, but not by my comrades. Léon, who was already attached to me, was sad. Lambesq, who already detested me, was radiant; he made a great show of condoling with me. Léon avoided me; he lacked courage to warn me. Régine said without ceremony:

“What a pity that he has nothing in him! such a handsome fellow!”

Even Purpurin muttered between his teeth:

“Monsieur Laurence isn’t the man to make people forget Monsieur Talma!”

I was returning with a heavy heart to my garret, certain of not closing my eyes during the night, when Moranbois called to me to drink a glass of beer with him. I longed to hide my head, so I refused.

“You are too proud, I suppose,” he said, “because you have been to college and I was brought up on the dung-heap?”

“If you take it that way,” I replied, “I will drink all you wish.”

When we were seated together in the corner of a brewery, he began:

“I have something to say to you from Bellamare, who hasn’t the time to speak to you himself to-night. Of course he must have a pow-wow with that princess he calls his daughter!”

“Is it Mademoiselle Impéria of whom you speak in that way?”

“Yes, I take that liberty by your leave, greenhorn! Impéria is no more to me than any of the rest. She hasn’t done anything bad yet; but patience, her turn will come, and Bellamare who always sees angels flying about on his ceiling, will realize in time that no woman on the stage is to be trusted, whether she wears openwork or silk stockings. But never mind that; Bellamare told me to console you for your bad luck to-night. It’s true enough that you were very bad. I expected that, but you went beyond my expectations.”

“If this is your way of consoling me—”

“Monsieur doesn’t expect congratulations, does he?”

“I know that I was execrable, and I am distressed, deeply distressed. What pleasure can you find in increasing my distress?”

“If you take it that way, my boy, it’s a different matter. Tell me why it is, that after rehearsing reasonably well, you suddenly became so cold and dismal?”

“As if I knew! can timidity ever give an account of itself?”

“Ah! there you are! you went onto the stage without excitement, considering yourself above your audience. You acted like the savage, who drinks rum with no idea that he is going to make himself drunk. Very good; distrust yourself after this, be afraid beforehand and you will be less afraid on the stage. Fear is a tribute which you have to pay sooner or later. I tell you this for your good and from your manager. He thinks that no harm is done and that it will go better next time.”

“He thinks so because he is kind and indulgent and optimistic; but you, who are all sincerity, don’t think anything of the sort!”

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"Do you want me to tell you the truth, without mincing matters or making faces?"

"Yes, tell me everything!"

"Well, my boy, you won't succeed if you keep on trying to please Impéria."

And as I started back, surprised by the giant's perspicacity, and placed my glass on the table, he added, fixing his colorless, staring eyes on mine:

"It surprises you, does it, to find that Moranbois sees farther than the others? But the fact is he sees everything. You are mad over that girl, you are with us in order to be near her. The hussy is hard to please, she's a true strolling player who has no eyes for anything but success. When a man doesn't work solely for the pleasure of doing well, he works ill, I tell you; and when he has a woman on his brain he does nothing but make a fool of himself. I have warned you, that's enough; I have nothing more to say to you."

And he left without giving me time to reply.

I had plenty of leisure to reflect upon the distressing consequences of my failure, for I didn't close my eyes that night. My misfortune naturally assumed absurd proportions in my eyes. Insomnia is a magnifying glass which makes hairs look on the walls of the brain like joists, and ants appear as large as hippopotami. I dozed only to wake with a start under a shower of apples which a hurricane shook down on my bedclothes. Sometimes it seemed to me that men were walking about through the streets of the good city of Orléans, lantern in hand, and the sole purpose of the lights was to enable the citizens to accost each other and say: "Did you notice how bad that actor was in the play to-night?"

"You were not bad," Léon said to me the next day. "You missed the opportunity to be good, that is all."

"But can one be good in a part that amounts to nothing?"

"You can be judicious, that is to say seek to keep within the proper limits of the part. You found those limits at the rehearsal; why did you not act up to them?"

"I was paralyzed."

"That was a very trifling mishap, and will probably be the only one. Try not to do as I did, make a failure on the first day from which I could not recover."

"What's that you say? If I had a quarter part of your talent, I should consider myself most fortunate!"

"My dear Laurence, I have not a suspicion of talent. Let us not talk about that, it saddens me and does no good."

As he really seemed sad, I dared not persist. He was one of those who do not wish to be comforted; but what a surprise his discouragement was to me! What in God's name, could he have dreamed of, if he was not satisfied with being successful in every part he undertook, and with inspiring more passions than he desired?

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I asked Bellamare's opinion thereupon. He mused a moment, and said:

"Léon thinks and talks like an ambitious man whose ambitions are thwarted; to hear him talk, you would often take him for an ingrate; but when you see him act, you feel that he has the generous impulses of a noble nature. I cannot therefore attribute his disgust with life to anything except some unhealthy mental tendency. If he were at the top of the ladder, if he had attained the greatest imaginable triumph in every direction, he would still dream of some purer glory, even though he must needs ascend to the moon to find it. But let us talk about yourself, my boy. You were confused last night. That does no harm. You must learn your lesson again and start fresh to-morrow. You have a better part in the second play and you can have your revenge."

Instead of taking my revenge, I was more paralyzed than on my first appearance. The same fright took possession of me, although I went on the stage without any visible emotion. My face, my whole person sustained the gaze of the audience without trepidation, and I was apparently at my ease. But as soon as my own voice struck my ear, my brain began to whirl, I repeated my lines in a hurry, like a task which I hoped to have done with, and I produced upon the spectator the effect of a self-sufficient party who looked down on his audience and did not take the trouble to act.

The actor's emotion assumes all imaginable forms in order to defeat his will. There is no false aspect which it does not borrow, no lie which it does not invent in order to disguise itself. The phenomenon that took place in my case was the most painful phenomenon with which I could have been afflicted, for I was sincerely modest and desirous to do well, and I was doomed to wear the mask of impertinence. It was not an absolutely novel experience to Bellamare, who had seen everything in his strolling career; but my case was so clearly defined that he was a little disconcerted by it, and I saw in his expressive glance more compassion than hope.

For my own part I was in such despair that my comrades were forced to encourage me. Even Moranbois said a few cheering words to me in his manner; but Impéria said nothing, whereupon my wound bled freely. She talked to me affably and sweetly on every other subject; but she avoided the faintest allusion to my disaster, and I knew not what to think as to her opinion of my prospects. I determined to put an end to my uncertainty, and I made bold to seek a tête-à-tête with her.

It was easier to find an opportunity in the provinces than in Paris. Although the fate of bad companies is wretched and pitiable, those which are only passable have a very agreeable time in most cities. In those which have theatrical performances only occasionally, the arrival of the *Roman Comique* is always a great event. And everywhere there are a certain number of enthusiasts who have a mania for the

players rather than for the play. Everywhere there is a swarm of young men of family to flutter and hover around the actresses. Everywhere there is a swarm of men of letters, young or old, who have unpublished manuscripts in their pockets, and, although they have no hope of having them acted, dream none the less of the thrilling pleasure of reading them to a few actors. Hence are born intimacies of which those most interested in maintaining them naturally bear all the expenses, invitations of all sorts, parties in the country with hunting and fishing, dinners and festivities according to the means of those concerned. These functions are always very lively, thanks to the good humor of the actors, who know how to extricate themselves gracefully from literary hornets' nests, and the coquetry of the actresses, who know how to avoid the snares of gallantry when they are so inclined.

Bellamare had no distaste for these pleasure parties; he was too well known everywhere to be accused of exploiting anybody. He had too much tact and wit not to pay his scot generously, and his good advice was worth all the dinners in the world. He was known to be a real father to the members of his troupe, and he was rarely invited without all the rest of us. Régine loved good cheer, and Lucinde to wear fine clothes; but Léon, enamored of solitude, exacting in his choice of associates, and blessed with a very sensitive pride, almost always declined the invitations. Moranbois, who was the busiest of the troupe, and who did not like to be under constant restraint when he went into society, preferred to take an hour or two of relaxation at the café with Purpurino Purpurini, whom he overwhelmed with blood-curdling invectives while he entertained him, and who, on his side, treated the ex-porter with supreme contempt. Those two irreconcilable enemies could not do without each other; no one ever knew why.

I confess that when our manager advised me of the first invitation extended to the troupe as a whole, I was a little surprised and inclined to follow Léon's example. I had not, like him, the ideas and manners of a gentleman; but I had retained the pride of the peasant who does not like to accept what he cannot return. Léon did not blame Bellamare for liking that merry, careless life, since he carried into it the fire of his intellect and the charm of his cheerful disposition; but he considered that he himself was crabbed and sour, and nothing could be more disagreeable, according to him, than an ill-humored parasite.

I had not the same reason for being scrupulous. I was naturally light-hearted; but, as an actor, I had as yet displayed my defects only. I was perhaps doomed to obscurity, I could afford the public no pleasure, I had no right to the kindly welcome which was accorded to the others. Discretion therefore would have commanded me to decline, but Impéria was of all the parties, and I decided to accept, at the expense of my pride. I saw that Léon disapproved my decision, but I pretended not to see it.

This first entertainment was offered by the officers of the garrison, half a dozen of whom clubbed together to invite us to a picnic which



had been in contemplation for a long while. All the arrangements were made, when the officer highest in rank among them, Captain Vachard, substituted for the projected row on the river and dinner *al fresco*, a regatta *on his brother's estate*, the said brother, Monsieur le Baron de Vachard, being the proprietor of a country house and a park watered by a tiny affluent of the Loire. The change did not seem to please the other officers; but *in the service* they don't select their own amusements when a superior officer is of the party, and they had to abandon the picnic and accept monsieur le baron's invitation. It was suggested to us in a whisper that the captain much preferred drawing upon his brother's cellar and pantry to paying his own scot, and that he enjoyed himself only at festivities which cost him nothing.

These first hints of the captain's character which were imparted to me predisposed me so strongly against him that I suggested that we should give up the fête. Léon expressed himself very emphatically as to the mistake we should make in submitting to the caprice of such a boor. Impéria said that she would do whatever Bellamare decided. Bellamare, who, by dint of knocking about the world, had become a little careless in matters of small importance, decided that it should be put to vote. The majority hilariously voted in favor of the regatta *on the baron's estate*. They would enjoy making sport of the proffered hospitality, if it gave rise to criticism, and to punish the captain for the imperious tone he had assumed with his lieutenants and sub-lieutenants, the women promised to make him toe the mark.

There were three leagues to travel, in the saddle or in carriages, to the baron's château. Saddle horses were procured for those ladies who wished to display their horsemanship; neither Bellamare nor Lambesq had any taste for riding, and a carriage was ordered, in which I was invited to occupy a seat with them and with Régine. Thus our three young actresses, Impéria, Lucinde and Anna, were escorted by the officers, and we followed them like trustful and sedate guardians. It seemed to us that Vachard had purposely arranged this triumphal exit from the city, and that he had assigned to himself the leading rôle therein, for he proposed to take the head of the procession with Impéria, who rode exceedingly well, and who yielded unreflectingly to the harmless pleasure of handling the captain's sweet-tempered mare. I remarked aloud that we—that is to say, the manager, my two comrades and myself—would form a most ridiculous rear-guard. A young *second comique*, named Marco, who had joined us a few days before, and who was a hare-brained youngster, agreed with me, and jumped up behind Lucinde, swearing that he would not dismount except at the point of the bayonet, as it was the cavalryman's duty to take the foot-soldier up behind in case of an emergency. Lucinde, whose stately equilibrium was sadly disturbed by this performance, was furiously angry, and Bellamare had to interpose gently—for he declared that he was not manager in the country—and the burlesque discussion continued, to the intense disgust of Vachard and amid the hearty

laughter of the bystanders, when I cut it short. Seeing that everybody was in good humor, and spying the captain's horse, which a private soldier was holding while the captain labored to induce Marco to adopt a more becoming line of conduct, I leaped upon that handsome and handsomely accoutred beast; I dug my heels into his sides so vigorously that the stupefied soldier dropped the reins, and I galloped away like an arrow motioning to Impéria to follow me. She understood me, she approved what I had done, and, moreover, her mare was accustomed to follow the animal of which I had taken forcible possession. I did not know how to ride by rule, but I had strong legs, a supple frame and the unbounded confidence of the peasant. In order to be surer of myself, I had picked up the stirrups, and I galloped as in the days when I skimmed over the freshly cut grass in the fields, riding bareback, with a rope for bridle. Impéria, who also had been brought up in the country and trained in all noble forms of exercise, was a remarkable horsewoman. In a twinkling we had traversed the great Place du Martroy and the whole city of Orléans, followed at a long distance by the cavalcade, laughing, shouting and applauding. The young officers were delighted by my audacity and the trick I had played on the captain. As for him, he did not laugh very heartily as you can imagine; but in order not to attract attention to the absurd predicament in which he was placed, he hurriedly entered the carriage with Bellamare and Marco, who had abandoned the idea of protecting the ladies when he saw how opportunely I upheld the honor of our troupe. Naturally, the carriage horse, although Vachard took the reins and lashed him fiercely, could not overtake the cavaliers. Impéria begged me to wait for them; but as soon as they drew near, we started off at full speed, spurred on by their shouts of encouragement and resolved not to be passed and not to give the captain a chance to overtake us.

Thus we reached the place where we must leave the bank of the Loire, and we did not know which road to take. The rapid ride had given my companion an animation which I had never seen on her face before.

"How beautiful you are!" I cried wildly, when she halted to ask me in which direction we should go.

She had confidence in me, you remember, ever since the day I had sworn never to dream of paying court to her. So she did not take my exclamation or my excitement in bad part.

"I ought to be like this on the stage, oughtn't I?" she replied, "and not cold as I am. But I might say as much of you; unluckily we can't act on horseback."

There was the moment to question her as to what she thought about me, and the opportunity had come unsought. Our horses needed to take breath, they were dripping with sweat. We dropped the reins on their necks while they found their road for themselves, and as we had a long lead of the others at that moment, we were able

to exchange a few words.

"You say," I continued, "that you are cold on the stage; do you say it to console me for being frigid?"

"You are frigid, it is true; but that is of little consequence if you are not frozen."

"I am very much afraid that I am both, and forever."

"You cannot tell."

"What do you think about it?"

"Nothing as yet; it's too soon."

"And, then, it makes no difference to you, does it?"

"Why do you say that?"

"It has seemed so to me."

"Why?"

"You cannot be particularly interested in me."

"What have I done, pray, to lose the confidence you gave me? Come, tell me!"

"You act as if you were no longer conscious of my existence."

"If I act so, my actions are deceitful. I constantly talk about you with Bellamare, and I was saying to him yesterday that I liked and esteemed you more and more every day."

"Why? Tell me why, I beg you. I would like so much to know how I could have deserved your friendship and Bellamare's!"

"I can very easily tell you why. You are kind-hearted, sincere, unselfish, intelligent, free from vice. In a word, you are as good a man as Léon, and you are more lively, more likable, and more sociable."

"I am very fortunate then; but still, if I never have any talent—"

"Then, unfortunately, you will leave us."

"Why so? Couldn't I make myself useful in some other line of parts than the lover's? Many people make a living on the stage without talent."

"They make a wretched living. No one should follow a profession he does not love."

"But I do love the stage notwithstanding my utter nullity; and many others are in the same box."

"In that case walk straight ahead, if you are not ambitious."

"I am not ambitious; I am—I haven't a very clear idea what I am."

"I will tell you. You have artistic tastes, and you will probably be an artist, whether you succeed as an actor, or take up something else. You love this heedless life, because of its uncertainty, the travelling about, new faces and new scenes to observe and enjoy or criticise; you love above all what I enjoy more than anything else, the association with other people, of different sorts, amiable or unamiable, amusing or depressing, or reprehensible and irritating—in a word, the gregarious life. It is like family life after all, without its never-ending chains, its heart-rending sorrows, and its appalling responsibilities; but it seems to me that, with Bellamare for manager, no one can be absolutely unhappy, and in the life we lead with him everything amuses

me or interests me.”

“I agree with you entirely. And so, if, although I fail absolutely of talent and success, I nevertheless cling to this pleasant, careless life, you will not take me for one of those wretched madmen who desperately pursue an absurd delusion? You will not despise me?”

“No, surely not, for I am in the same situation as you. I persist in my trial of a career in which I am not at all sure of succeeding, and I feel that I shall persist in it in one way or another, even if I do not succeed in developing genuine talent. What would you have! it’s like that; when one has caught the stage fever, everything else is a bore.”

“But it is not your natural or your final environment, is it? Are you not likely, from one day to another, to have an opportunity to make what is called a fine match?”

“I have no desire to make a fine match!”

“But you surely have no desire to make one which would bring you to want?”

“No, because of the children I might have; for, if no one else were concerned—speaking for myself alone, I am indifferent to any sort of privation. With orderly habits and hard work one can always succeed in procuring the necessities of life.”

“Let me tell you that no one knows you. All your fellow-actors think that you are calculating, cold—yes, and ambitious. Bellamare predicts a great future for you; they imagine that you will sacrifice everything to that end.”

“If I believed in it, perhaps I should consider it a duty to sacrifice everything to it; but I have too little belief in it to give it any serious thought. I do my best, I try to understand, and I wait.”

“And meanwhile do you not suffer? Are you happy?”

“Why, yes, as you see!”

“Are you sure of the man who loves you?”

“Have I said that anyone loved me?”

“You said that you loved someone.”

“That is not the same thing.”

“Can it be that you love an ingrate?”

“He may not be ungrateful. Let us assume that he doesn’t suspect my preference for him.”

“Then he must be a blind man, an imbecile, a downright brute!”

She laughed heartily, and her merriment made me jump for joy. I fancied that she had invented that love, as a preservative from foolish declarations, on a day of ennui or dread, and that her heart was as free as her life. She was mischievous enough to have devised that stratagem on the spur of the moment, for, since we had been travelling, she had revealed her true disposition, which was constantly held in check before strangers, but charmingly playful and even roguish with her comrades; and, as she was neither deceitful nor cunning, she could not hope to impose upon me when we were alone.

“Then you were making sport of us,” I cried; “you do not love

anyone?"

She turned as if she were going to reply; but, as she caught sight of a horseman who had ridden ahead of the others and was rapidly approaching us, she turned pale and said, calling my attention to him:

"It's the captain! He has taken one of his young officers' horses, I suppose. So those fellows are cowards, aren't they? They dared not preserve us from attack!"

"Well, even so? What do you fear from this Vachard?"

"I fear—I don't know what—a quarrel between you."

"In your presence? I will not grant him that favor. Let us give him a race, as he challenges us."

"Good!" she replied, "let us run away!"

We rode like the wind until we reached a great ugly house, idiotically painted pink, and our horses bore us into a courtyard where three pots of geraniums, scorched by the sun, and two shocking terra cotta lions put the finishing touch to the decoration of the château.

The Baron de Vachard in person received us with a dazed air, but, when he recognized our mounts, understood or assumed that we were two of his guests. He was a man of about forty-five years, very little older than his brother the captain; indeed they may have been twins, I don't remember. They were extraordinarily alike, the same short, stout figure, the high shoulders, the florid complexion, the sparse hair just turning gray, the short and, as it were, forgotten nose, the protruding eyes, the prominent ears turned forward like those of a restive horse, the very heavy, protruding jaw; but the expressions of those two faces, which seemed cast in the same mould, differed materially. That of the elder was mild and stupid, the captain's stupid and irascible. Orderly and economical habits seemed to be equally characteristic of both. They had another habit, I ought to say an infirmity, in common, which was soon brought to our notice.

The baron, noticing that the horses were in a terrible condition, gave orders that they should be rubbed down, without asking us whether we were warm or thirsty ourselves; then he led us in silence to a very cool and very dark salon, and there, after making an apparent effort as if to collect his ideas, he said to us with a distressed air:

"Where is my brother?"

"He is behind us," I replied; "he was close on our heels."

"Ah! very good," said he.

And he waited for us to begin the conversation; Impéria, impelled by the spirit of mischief, waited for him to do the same, and I waited from curiosity to see the result of their mutual waiting.

The baron, who, whether from absent-mindedness or imbecility, could think of absolutely nothing to say to us, made the circuit of the room, with a curious pucker of the lip; you would have said that he was mentally whistling a bar of music. We were assured that that was the fact when the sound became almost distinct, and we were able to recognize a rendering, strictly *sui generis*, of the *bravura* air from *La*

*Dame Blanche.* He became aware of his preoccupation and, glancing at us, made a mighty effort to break the silence and informed us that it was a fine day. Continued treacherous silence on Impéria's part. He turned his round eyes on me, as if to question me. I turned mine away in order to see how he would extricate himself from his embarrassment. He did it by halting in front of the long window and resuming more distinctly his whistling of the strain: *Ah! what joy to be a soldier!* accompanied by drumming on the window pane; after which he hurried from the room, apparently forgetting our presence.

Impéria laughed heartily. I touched her elbow, for I had discovered in the dim recesses of the room a personage whom the sudden transition from the bright sunlight to comparative darkness had made invisible to us at first. It was a tall, stout, dark woman, once very beautiful, Mademoiselle de Sainte-Claire, of whom we had heard; she was formerly known as Mademoiselle Clara, when she was a provincial actress playing the coquette parts; now she was Monsieur de Vachard's companion and housekeeper.

"Don't mind the baron's manners," she said to us, in nowise disconcerted. "He and his brother—well, they're a good pair. You have not come here to be entertained by his conversation, have you? but to pass a day in the country. It won't be very amusing, I warn you. With stupid people everything is stupid; but the dinner will be all right, I will answer for that. The baron's a gourmand, that's his only good quality so far as I know. As for the other, he isn't even that: but what in heaven's name have you done with the stupidest of the Vachards?"

She did not wait for a reply but ordered refreshments for us, and continued to talk plainly and without ceremony before the servants.

"Well, my children, what are you in Balandar's company? Oh! I beg pardon, you call him Bellamare now, that's his stage name; his name used to be Balandar formerly, but perhaps that wasn't his right name either. We actors, you know, take any name that we want to or can! For the moment I am an ex-noble maiden who has had bad luck. You know, the same old game! The Vachards you meet on the high road don't believe it, but they like to persuade themselves that it's true, and they repeat it to their friends and acquaintances; it sounds well! Your manager must have mentioned me to you, hasn't he? He used to be very fond of me once, in the days when I was a pretty young girl, as slender as you, my dear, and he—I won't say that he was as handsome as you, my boy, but he was young and witty and had a certain fascination with the women. Does he still adore them all at once, the good-for-nothing? Faith, I was terribly jealous of him and I revenged myself too. But tell me, my dear, you are not the one who is said to be his temporary joy and pride, are you? the fair Impéria?"

Impéria blushed for the second time. The blood had risen in her cheeks when the woman had spoken of adventitious nobility; she was altogether confused when she received the insult full in the face; but

as I was about to interpose, she took the words out of my mouth, and retorted vehemently:

"I am no man's joy, and I am not fair, as you see!"

"True," replied La Sainte-Claire, "you are small and make no show; but you are pretty, and as you have come alone with this tall, good-looking fellow here, why, I suppose you are lovers, my turtle-doves, or married perhaps? At all events, you are not the one upon whom the happiness of your manager and our captain depends for the moment. This handsome Leander, who acts as your escort, would not put up with that."

"So there is a lady in our troupe," I inquired, "whom the captain boasts of having fascinated?"

"Why, yes, the famous Impéria, whom I am crazy to see!"

"He boasts of it, does he?" I repeated, turning purple with wrath, while poor Impéria turned pale and gave me one of those heart-rending glances which unconsciously call upon the first passer-by for protection or vengeance.

"He doesn't boast of it, perhaps," replied La Sainte-Claire; "he tells it in confidence to his whole regiment, and in return for that confidence my baron, who is not liberality personified, has outdone himself to-day with a grand dinner for his brother's mistress. I must tell you that the baron is jealous because the captain makes love to me too. So he is delighted when the captain turns his attention to others; but no matter how much the captain may seek distraction elsewhere, he will always come back to me, because I hold the purse-strings, you understand."

Impéria passed her arm through mine as if to go away; she was so agitated that I thought that she was ill, and her name slipped from my lips. La Sainte-Claire, when she realized the blunder she had made—perhaps purposely—was not at all confused, but, with the heedlessness of bad breeding, roared with laughter.

"Let us go," said Impéria, leading me outside. "It makes me blush with shame to be brought in contact with such people."

"Let us stay," I replied. "Stay, since you are with me. Despise that shameless duenna, who lies from jealousy, I doubt not, and let us see if monsieur le capitaine really dares to boast—"

"I understand you, Laurence! You mean to give him a lesson. I forbid it; you have no right to do it."

"I have the right to do it, and it is my duty also. Remember, you have said farewell forever to the social circle which you have left. You are an actress; you have in me, in everyone of your comrades, a brother whose honor is responsible for yours. I do not know whether Lambesq thinks as I do, but I know that Bellamare, Léon, even Moranbois, and perhaps Marco, if they were in my place, would not allow you to be insulted. If we were of gentle birth, our protection might compromise you; but we are actors, and social prejudice does not forbid us to be men of spirit."

"If all the others are not," she replied, "you certainly are, I know; and that is the reason why I do not choose—"

She could not finish her sentence, for the captain, red as a poppy and streaming with perspiration, came toward us with the evident intention of upbraiding us for our escapade. I stepped forward to meet him, and glared at him in such a way as to disconcert him, for he stammered some incoherent words, vented his wrath on a geranium he almost uprooted from the earthen pot in which it was languishing, smiled a forced smile, puckered his lips as his brother had done when he welcomed us in his salon, and passed on whistling the same air. They had the same trick, and in the regiment they had been christened the brothers *Fufu*.

Impéria recovered her courage when she saw that the captain did not pick a quarrel with me, and she began to laugh at the episode.

"Really I am a fool," she said; "I still retain prudish notions which are not suited to my profession. I give you my word, Laurence, that I blush to think of my anger a moment ago. It is our business to amuse other people, and we should be philosophical enough to be amused by them when they are ridiculous, and to be out of reach of any insult from them, especially when we are deserving of respect."

I allowed her to believe that the incident was closed, and we hastened to join the merry party who had already embarked on monsieur le baron's fleet. Imagine three wretched skiffs on a long stagnant pond, and you have the regatta in your mind's eye. At a glance I saw that all my comrades were bent on mischief and that the young officers' hearts beat fast with guilty hopes, the purpose or desire of all being to force the captain to take a bath. The women understood and declined to go aboard the boats, except La Sainte-Claire, who leaped clumsily and resolutely into the flagship and took the tiller, while the captain grasped the oars and requested Impéria to entrust herself to his care. In her place I accepted the invitation, after coming to an understanding with Marco, who was steering the second boat, and Bellamare, who had taken charge of the third. Instead of the projected race, a naval battle was soon in progress, and the other two boats combined in a fierce attack upon ours. The plan was to push the captain overboard in the confusion of the battle and in the midst of a frightful uproar. I intended to perform that feat, while making a pretence of defending him, as I was one of his crew; and it would have been a simple matter enough with that short-legged knight, had it not been for La Sainte-Claire, who was not hoodwinked but did battle stoutly for the right, turning upon me and calling me a traitor, with loud laughter and coarse jests. She was as strong as a man and as brave as every woman who fights. I allowed her to pronounce against me and to try to throw me overboard. Then I brought my natural agility into play, for I could not exert my strength with a woman, however unmanly she might be, and with the same movement of my legs I



tossed monsieur le baron, his amiable brother and his intrepid house-keeper into the slimy waves. Then I leaped into another boat, which allowed itself to be captured, and I shouted victory, thereby bestowing more honor than pleasure on Vachard as he wallowed about with La Sainte-Claire in the shallow but far from limpid water.

They made a pretence of taking the affair good-humoredly, and everybody was deceived, myself excepted; the others decided that the captain was a better fellow than they supposed, and the dinner was an uproariously merry function which made any private investigation of the morning impossible; but when we adjourned to a rustic arbor for our coffee and cigars, Vachard the younger approached me and said in a low voice, and in a sharp, clear tone in striking contrast to his vinous glance:

"You have foundered my horse and ruined my uniform; you did it purposely."

"I did it purposely," I replied coolly.

"Very good," he rejoined.

And he walked away.

The next morning, at daybreak, I received a visit from two officers, friends of the captain, who called upon me to retract the statement I had made or to give him satisfaction. I refused to do the first, agreed to do the second, and we made an appointment for the next day, after the performance, for my presence was necessary there. Strangely enough I was not so excited by that first duel as I have been since by other similar meetings. My cause seemed to me so righteous, I hated the man so cordially for insulting Impéria and presuming to compromise her in the eyes of his fellow-officers! I looked upon myself as the natural champion of the troupe, and although I had very little knowledge of fencing and Vachard much, I did not for one instant doubt that destiny would declare for the righteous cause and the worthy purpose—Another strange thing was that I acted very well that night. I had, to be sure, an excellent part, which I had accepted in fear and trembling, and which I filled to the satisfaction of all concerned. I felt raised above myself by my confidence in myself as a man, and I forgot to doubt myself as an artist. Indeed I had one very fine moment during the play, and I was applauded for the first and last time in my life. The excellent Bellamare, weeping for joy, kissed me as soon as the curtain had fallen; Impéria pressed my hands effusively.

"Go on, lovely princess," said a hoarse voice behind me, "kiss him too if you have any more heart than a grasshopper."

At this affable observation from Moranbois, Impéria smiled and offered me her cheek, saying:

"If that will reward him let him take it!"

I kissed her, too much confused to derive any pleasure from it; my heart was suffocating me. Moranbois tapped me on the shoulder and said in my ear:

"Knight of the fair sex, someone is waiting for you!"

How did he know anything about that affair of mine, which I had concealed with the greatest care? I have no idea, but what he told me made me jump for joy. My lips had drunk the perfume of my ideal, I was a hundred cubits tall, I could have overthrown a legion of devils.

"My friend," I said to Moranbois, who had followed me to the dressing-room, and, contrary to his habit, obligingly assisted me to dress, "you used to be fencing-master in your regiment; tell me how a man, who knows absolutely nothing, must go to work to disarm his man?"

"You must do it as best you can," he replied. "Is your blood cool, idiot?"

"Yes."

"Well then, have no fear; get the start of him, my bully, and you will kill him."

This prediction produced no unpleasant impression on me. Had I the desire to kill? No, surely not; I am very humane and not in the least vindictive. I could not see very distinctly in the dream which was bearing me on. I wanted to triumph, I did not consider myself skilful enough to choose the means of triumph. I knew that the captain was a formidable antagonist, and I was not afraid of him; that is all I remember of that swift-moving drama, into which I flung myself like a man impelled by blind passion. At that moment I should have looked upon any philosophical scruple as an argument suggested by fear.

I had asked Léon and Marco to be my seconds; I desired that it should be a clearly defined affair between soldiers and actors. As Vachard had the choice of weapons we fought with swords. I do not know what happened. For two or three minutes I saw a constant flashing at the end of my arm, I felt an intense heat in my breast, as if my blood, in great haste to leave me, were rushing to meet innumerable sword points. I was thinking about parrying a thrust when Vachard fell to the ground. It seemed to me that my weapon had pierced nothing but space; I looked for my opponent in front of me, and he was gasping at my feet.

I had thought that I was cool, I found that I was absolutely drunk, and when I heard the regimental surgeon say: "He is dead!" I thought that he was talking about me, and I was surprised to find that I was on my feet.

At last I realized that I had killed a man; but I felt no remorse, for he had ninety-nine chances out of a hundred of killing me, and I was wounded in the arm. I did not notice it until my wound was dressed, and at the same moment I saw the livid face of Vachard, who seemed absolutely dead. My whole body was cold as a stone, and my mind did not work.

He was very badly hurt, but he recovered; he was not worthy of a dramatic end. He afterward lost his brother and married La Sainte-Claire, who is to-day the Baronne de Vachard, but who gives no more regattas.

I was amazed, on leaving the scene of the duel, to find Moranbois at my side. He had followed me and had witnessed the affair without showing himself; he escorted me to my lodgings without speaking, and passed the night with me, still without a word. I was excited and I dreamed a great deal, but I dreamed only of the stage, not at all of the duel. When I woke I saw the Hercules dozing on a chair just outside my curtains. He replied to my thanks with a vulgar jest, but he shook hands with me, saying that he was satisfied with my conduct.

My wound was not serious, and despite the surgeon's prohibition, I went out without waiting for him to call, and hurried to my victim's quarters to inquire for him. He seemed to be in a desperate plight, but in the evening they felt more hopeful, and I was able to attend the rehearsal without any display of emotion and without carrying my arm in a sling.

I supposed that no one at the theatre knew anything about the matter, for nothing had transpired in the town; but Moranbois had told my comrades the whole story, and Bellamare came to me with open arms.

"You showed us last night that you were an artist," he said, "but we did not need to hear of this affair of honor to know that you were a man. But don't get in the habit of indulging in that sort of diversion; now that I know that you have talent, it would be very disagreeable to me to have my handsome *jeune premier* appear minus an eye or a leg. I will put into your next engagement a condition for the good of the service, that you are not to fight duels."

While he talked with me in this playful tone, he had a tear in the corner of his eye. I saw that he was attached to me, and I embraced him affectionately. Impéria also embraced me, saying:

"Do not get accustomed to this either."

And she added in an undertone:

"Laurence, you are a good fellow and you are brave, too, but, you see, everybody here believes—something that is not true and cannot be. Be considerate as well as brave, and make people understand that you are not thinking of me."

"Why, what does it matter to you?" I retorted, wounded by her preoccupation with herself after the peril I had just escaped and with which my breast was still heaving. "If people should say that I love you, would it be a disgrace to you?"

"No, indeed; but—"

"But what? Would your favorite be offended?"

"If I have a favorite, he does not give me a thought as I have told you. But I accepted your friendship and I can bind myself no farther. Is everything to be changed between us? Shall I be obliged to protect myself, to be on my guard, to treat you as a young man with whom I must weigh my words, even my glances, in order not to seem to act like a coquette or a foolish girl? You know that it is my purpose to remain free, and that, in order to do that, I must not allow myself to

love. If you are my friend, you will not begin a struggle the thought of which has always alarmed me and put me to flight. You surely do not wish to ruin the happiness which I have gained with so much difficulty after disappointments and sorrows of which you have no idea?"

I was conquered. I swore that I would always be her comrade and her brother, and that she should have no reason to protect herself from my persecution. It did not occur to me to accuse her of selfishness or coldness, although it should have been clear to me that she was one or the other when I found that she was not in love with another man, or that she had conquered that love in order to avoid its consequences.

Léon also was pleased with my behavior, and he told me so with much warmth. Régine overwhelmed me with caresses, Anna began to worship me as a hero, Lambesq detested me more than ever, little Marco fairly doted on me and constituted himself my *âme damnée*. Purpurin, desiring to manifest his esteem, called me Monsieur *de* Laurence. Moranbois, while he continued to treat me roughly, ceased calling me a clown. The most insignificant attaché of the theatre deemed himself ennobled by my renown; in a single day I had become the lion of the troupe.

The affair soon began to be talked about in the city. The regiment had as little to say as possible of the harsh lesson administered to an officer by a strolling player. Vachard was neither popular nor esteemed; but although the others were in their hearts on my side and not on his, the *esprit de corps* would not permit them to justify me openly, and some of them talked about a mad freak on my part, followed by a lucky stroke. The *civilians* would not agree that I had played so unimportant a rôle, and in the cafés there were some sharp disputes of which I was the subject. The soldier loves the actor, but for whom he would be bored to death in garrison; but he does not like to have a civilian use the sword skilfully; whereas, among those who do not wear uniforms, there is great rejoicing when a civilian of the lowest order, that is to say, an actor, holds his own against a swaggering captain.

In the more exalted circles, at the prefecture, at the general's, and in the salons of the city, there was much excitement and questioning and comment; people too *comme il faut* were scandalized by the fervor with which my prowess was extolled by young men too advanced in their opinions. The result was that Bellamare, who was as shrewd and sagacious as experience itself, called us together on the day before the next performance and said to us with his usual good humor:

"My dear children, we have gathered the palms of glory in this good city; but glory in arms is harmful to the artist, and from information which I have received from several sources, I am led to believe that we may have some disturbance to-morrow night in the pit, perhaps even in the orchestra. It may be that we shall be used as a pretext for the gratification of enmities of which we know nothing, but for

which the authorities or public opinion will try to hold us responsible. The safest way is to paste a sheet of blank paper over the poster, and engage our second-class carriage for to-night. When our persons are far away, our glory will remain unimpaired by a contest between fists and cabbage-stumps; for if the artist has his devoted partisans, so has the warrior his. Let us be off, therefore, and may the Olympian gods, Mars and Apollo, protect us!"

"*Vive* Bellamare, who is always right!" cried Marco; "and *vive* Laurence, too, whom no one of us will ever disown!"

"Let us all shout: '*Vive* Laurence!'" rejoined Bellamare. "He is our pride in spite of everything!"

"You expected to make money here," said I, "and my laurels are likely to cost you more than they are worth."

"My son," was his reply, "money always comes to him who knows how to wait, and, if it never comes, why, honor is of greater worth."

Before we left, I desired to hear from Vachard again, and I hurried to his quarters. The baron in person received me in the dining-room, where the table was laid for breakfast. He was so distraught that he did not recognize me, and offered me a chair. I thanked him and was about to take my leave when he recognized me.

"Ah! indeed!" he exclaimed; "it was you—*fufu*—who nearly killed my—*fufu*—You are sorry for it—very good—*fufu*—An absurd quarrel, very unfortunate, very unfortunate! but what was to be done—A soldier—*fufu*—is forced to be sensitive, and you took his—*fufu*—his mistress from him."

I felt that the blood was rushing to my head and that in another moment I should pick a quarrel with the baron for believing and persisting in believing his brother's impudent lie.

"How is he?" I asked hurriedly; "I do not wish to hear anything else; do you hope to save his life?"

"Yes, yes—*fufu*—we hope to."

"Very well, when he has recovered, be kind enough to tell him that I did not choose to leave the province without leaving my address for him in case he should care to try it again."

And I handed him a card with the name and address of my father, which he took and gazed at stupidly, saying:

"Try it again?—why, no!—What for? try it again with whom? Laurence—*fufu*—nurseryman and market-gardener; that isn't you, is it?"

"It's my father."

"Then you're not a gentleman? they said—*fufu*—that you were of good family!"

"I am of good family, by your leave."

"Then—I don't understand."

His stupefaction was interpreted by a fit of humming so prolonged that I took advantage of it to shrug my shoulders and retire.

I met at the door one of the lieutenants who had been my confederates on the occasion of the regatta, and he detained me a quarter

of an hour talking about my duel. I was just about to bid him adieu and leave him, when we heard a strange and mysterious duet in the apartments on the ground floor, the windows of which were open: two persons were whistling, apparently rehearsing something, each taking a passage, and from time to time whistling in unison.

"The captain is saved," said the young officer; "he is whistling with his brother; I recognize his *fufu*."

"What! are you sure? Day before yesterday, he was no better than dead, and to-day he is whistling!"

"Just so. When he was three-fourths dead, he whistled mentally, I am sure; and when he is really dead, he will whistle in eternity."

"But in his present condition, his fool of a brother ought to make him keep quiet instead of exciting him."

"If you think that either of them knows what he is doing, you give them credit for more reasoning power than they ever had. This husky imitation of the *galoubet*, which picks up only snatches of tunes, was given them by Providence to conceal from their own eyes and reveal to the eyes of others the absolute emptiness of their minds."

Thus did I take leave of that Vachard whom I had run through, and who never asked me for more.

Now, monsieur, I will come at once to the principal incidents of my story, passing over in silence the great multitude of unpleasant or ridiculous adventures which happen every day in the life of those who travel, and of actors above all. Of all nomads we are the most observing and the most addicted to laughing at human life, because we seek on every side types of mankind to seize and exaggerate. Every absurd or eccentric person is a model who poses for us without knowing it. Comic actors have an abundant and never-failing harvest. Serious rôles are less favored in this respect. They can study behavior, expression, costume and accent; but they very seldom if ever have an opportunity to see in action the passion which they are supposed to express entertainingly or forcibly, and to hear it speak. They have a sort of professional grace, they are generally blessed with very little intelligence, and they content themselves with stereotyped attitudes and intonations which they have learned by heart. Unluckily for me, I had a little common sense and power of reflection, and I considered that this fashion of acting like everybody else was a means of shirking all serious work, all real inspiration. I confided my trouble to Bellamare.

"You are right," he replied, "I can only teach you how to use the threads that may save your life when you have missed the rope. Everyone must give expression to his lines according to his own nature, and the great artists are the ones who depend upon themselves for everything. Learn to know yourself, try your wings and take the risk."

I made fruitless efforts. I was running over with passion, but I could no more express it on the stage than in real life. The necessity of concealing my love from her who inspired it was perhaps too great an effort of my will, too great a sacrifice of myself. I could not find in

fiction the accent which my own secret emotion lacked. At Beaugency, where I made my second trial, I had lost the impulse which inspired me at Orléans on the day of my duel. I was very fair, according to my comrades; that is to say, in my own judgment, utterly insignificant. I had progressed in one direction however: I had rid myself of the impertinent or bored air. I acted becomingly; if my part had a touch of timidity, I interpreted it according to nature; in a word, I had found the *air* which was suited to my age and my line of parts. I had become tolerable, but I was likely to remain insignificant, and the worst of it was that Bellamare was satisfied, and that all my comrades made the best of it. They were fond of me, in fact they had begun to be too fond of me, so that they simply asked me to stay with them and ceased to see my faults.

Such also was Impéria's frame of mind. I was too handsome, she said, to displease the public. I was too good a fellow and too lovable for the troupe to get along without me.

So far as the present was concerned, my object was gained. I had aspired only to live near her without offending her; but as to the future, I could see not the faintest indication of the wealth or the renown which would have justified me in aspiring to be her support, and I must simply live from day to day, light-hearted and spoiled and happy in appearance, but in reality in the depths of despair.

On leaving Beaugency I met with a very romantic adventure which has left its mark upon my life. I can tell it to you without compromising anybody, as you will see.

We were to go on to Tours, without stopping at Blois, where another company was performing just then. Léon asked Bellamare if he would mind leaving him in Blois for two days. He had a friend there who urged him to stay with him twenty-four hours. Bellamare answered that he could not refuse any request of so faithful a member of his company, and furthermore that he intended to stop at Blois. Impéria wished to pass the night at the hotel there to take care of Anna, who had been taken seriously ill as we left Beaugency, and needed a little rest.

The rest of the troupe went on toward Tours, in charge of Moranbois. Bellamare and the two young actresses took rooms at a hotel in the lower town, and Léon urged me to go with him to his friend's house, who would be delighted to know me and give me a bed. I accepted, on condition that I should not go there until after the play, and that he should not introduce me to his friend until the next morning. Bellamare had given me also leave of absence for twenty-four hours.

"Don't stand on ceremony," said Léon; "my friend is a bachelor, and you will be entirely free in his house. At whatever hour of the night you appear with your valise, the concierge will let you in and show you to your room. I will tell my friend you are coming, and he will count upon seeing you but will not sit up for you."

## A ROLLING STONE

He gave me the address and some directions; after which he left me. I was curious to see the performance of the company then playing in the town, and to find out whether other provincial lovers were better or worse than I. They were worse, but that fact afforded me little consolation. During the performance a violent storm burst in the town, and it was still raining in torrents when the crowd issued from the theatre in a grand hurly-burly of carriages and umbrellas.

I had met near the theatre a young artist whom I had known slightly in Paris, and who took me to a café nearby to await the end of the shower. He even offered to share his room with me, which was quite near the theatre, and tried to dissuade me from going in search of my quarters in the old town, on the other side of the hill—an out-of-the-way place, he said, where it would be very hard for me to find my way. But I was afraid that, in spite of his promise, Léon would have taken the trouble to sit up for me, and so, as soon as the sky was a little brighter, I started out to find No. 23 of the designated street, of which I beg you to permit me not to mention the name.

I had to hunt a long while, ascend heaven knows how many perpendicular staircases, descend several others, and wander at random through picturesque, narrow, dark and utterly deserted streets. The clock on an old church struck one just as I made sure at last that I was in the street I had sought so long, and in front of No. 23, upon which the moon shone dimly. Was it really 23? was it not 25? I was about to ring when a wicket opened as if someone had heard me coming; the person inside looked at me, then the door opened, and an old servant, whose face I could not see, asked me in a low voice:

“Is it you?”

“Certainly it is I,” I replied, “the friend who is expected—”

“Hush! hush!” she interrupted; “follow me.”

I supposed that everybody was asleep, or that there was someone sick in the house, and I followed my guide on tiptoe. She had on list slippers and walked like a ghost, her face shaded by her white cap. I ascended in her wake a spiral Renaissance staircase, which, though but dimly lighted by a night light, seemed to me to be exquisitely carved. I was in one of those wonderfully well preserved old mansions which are the principal adornment and source of interest in provincial cities, Blois in particular. The old woman stopped on the first floor, opened a daintily carved door, and said to me:

“Go in, and above all things don’t come out!”

“Never?” I asked with a laugh.

“Hush! hush!” she replied in a frightened tone, putting her finger to her lips.

Thereupon I saw her pale, stern face, which seemed unreal to me, and which vanished in the darkness of the staircase like a vision.

“Evidently,” I thought, “there is someone at death’s door in this delightful old mansion. It will not be a very cheerful abode, but I may be able to be of some comfort to Léon at this painful time.”



And I turned and entered a charming apartment, charming in shape, decoration and furnishing. I expected to find Léon there. I walked noiselessly through a reception room to a dainty little salon, or rather boudoir, where there was a fire, an agreeable precaution in that tempestuous weather, which had drenched and congealed me; candles were burning in the candelabra, two large easy-chairs of rare workmanship stood at each side of the fireplace, but their cushions of Tours silk were fresh and well-rounded and indicated that they had not recently been used. The handsome furniture, arranged with great care, had the appearance of the furniture in houses that have long been unoccupied. The crystal pendants of the chandelier glistened discreetly beneath a cover of silvery gauze; the lace antimacassars of the chairs were irreproachably white and stiff. Two pretty cabinets with glass doors, one containing Japanese curios, the other figures in old Dresden ware, were closed and locked. There was a work-table, indicating the temporary or regular sojourn of a woman; but there was nothing on it, not a shred of silk or cotton clung to its velvet cover.

At the end of the boudoir, opposite the fireplace, I saw a tapestry portière, which I cautiously raised. Naught save darkness and silence. I took a candle and entered the sweetest little bed-room I had ever seen. It was blue, hung with azure silk damask, with tassels of white silk. A white and gold bed, with a fringed canopy and ample curtains of the same color and texture as the hangings, occupied, like a monument, almost the whole of one side of the room, which was not large, but was very high. Opposite the bed was a white marble mantel, with bas-reliefs of gilded copper; and on it a Louis XVI. clock of rare beauty, candlesticks with three branches, white and gold like the clock, and two white marble Loves which were evidently the work of a skilful master with a well-defined style of his own. A commode, a secretary and étagères of rosewood, with medallions of old Sèvres, a small tête-à-tête covered with satin, two or three easy-chairs, beautifully embroidered by hand, a reddish-brown carpet, with delicate blue flowers, a Venetian mirror in its diamond-studded frame, two large pastels representing lovely women exceedingly décolleté, as they had a perfect right to be—and heaven knows what else! exquisite trifles lying on all the shelves, everything in fact denoted the bedroom of a rich and artistic, refined and dainty—and perhaps voluptuous woman.

When I had made an inventory of that too luxurious nest, I wondered whether it was really intended for me, or whether the old housekeeper had not made a shocking blunder by guiding me thither instead of some perfumed marchioness. Then I remembered that Léon had rich relations, that he had lived in society, that he had friends in *high life*, and that he whose hospitality I had accepted was a bachelor and in independent circumstances; so that there was nothing to be surprised at in his having furnished a beautiful suite of rooms in his superb house for some hare-brained mistress, or for some lady

of even higher station, who came sometimes mysteriously to a rendezvous with him.

But why the devil did they do the honors of that palatial apartment to a poor, drenched, muddy strolling actor, who could have contented himself with a sack of straw in an attic room without departing from his habits?—That seemed to me a superb piece of irony. Had they no more modest quarters in that princely mansion to offer a humble guest? Was that the chamber set aside for friends? In that case Léon must be there, and I tried to find a second bedroom in the same suite.

There was none. I determined to make myself at home, and postpone till the next day the discovery that the housekeeper had lost her mind. That was her business, not mine. I was tired and cold; my little wound pained me slightly, and, as the first thrill of amazement gave place to the longing for rest and sleep, I sat down in the tête-à-tête, touched a match to the edifice of firewood on the hearth, and began to remove my shoes, for I was ashamed of the tracks they left on the carpet.

As I glanced at the reflection of the bed in the Venetian mirror, I noticed that the silk coverlet had not been removed, and that there was nothing to indicate that that gorgeous affair was anything more than a bed made for show. I lifted the heavy damask folds, and discovered that there were neither sheets nor blankets on the white satin mattress. This gave me further food for reflection. Evidently that luxurious couch was not intended for me, or else there was a more modest bed somewhere, better adapted for simple mortals. I looked for it in vain. Nothing in the dressing-rooms, no recess hidden in the wall; nothing at all to lie upon unless the usual occupant of the blue chamber were a tiny little lady capable of lying at full length on the satin-covered tête-à-tête. For me, who was already five feet five, there was no hope in that direction, and I resigned myself to the necessity of going to sleep in a sitting posture; but in five minutes I found that I was too warm, and I stretched myself out on the floor in the middle of the room; five minutes more I was too cold. It was very plain that my scratch had given me a touch of fever. It seemed to me that Léon's proffered hospitality was a wretched jest, and the prohibition to leave the apartment was evidently the transparent seal of a practical joke. And yet Léon was not facetiously inclined. Absolute silence reigned throughout the house, so that one would have thought that it was deserted. There was the same silence outside. The moon was shining brightly now on that sloping street, which descended in zigzag lines, bordered with walls surmounted by tufted trees.

The succession of gardens was broken here and there by houses which seemed smaller and smaller as the street sloped away; ancient mansions or modern villas, it was impossible to distinguish the difference in the darkness, our generation not having as yet invented a characteristic architectural style.

I dared not open the window, I was still impelled to suppose that

there was some invalid in the house whose precious slumber must be respected; but I could see very well through the blue panes, which gave to the picture before me an unreal aspect, like that of operatic moonlight. There were no shutters, the Renaissance windows being fitted with prismatic panes. The flowering lindens raised their great round tops over the wall opposite; a little farther on were columns supporting a vine-clad arbor on a terrace; on the right was a small factory, which might be a porter's lodge, but which resembled an ancient tomb. I know not why that silent, deserted street, with its low buildings, its graceful curves, and its lines of trees made me think of the probable aspect of a suburb of Pompeii or a part of Tusculum in the morning twilight. As a clock in the distance struck half-past one, I determined to wrap myself in my travelling cloak and lie down on the satin mattress, covering myself with the enormous blue damask coverlet, thanks to which I was deliciously comfortable, and passed speedily into that pleasant half-consciousness which precedes tranquil slumber.

It was the first time in my life that I had ever lain upon so soft and sumptuous a bed; it would probably be the last; and I was not sorry to enjoy the perfume of that dainty luxury and refined taste. The wood continued to crackle and cast sudden floods of light on the pictures, the furniture and the ceiling, which was painted to represent white clouds on a background of rose-colored sky. Gradually the fire died away and enveloped the whole room in a soft light which resembled my idea of the famous azure grotto. I asked myself whether it was so comfortable in my present situation that my dreams would be fulfilled if I could live on so forever. I recalled the farm where I was brought up, the great dining-room with its ceiling of rough timbers, from which bunches of golden onions and red tomatoes hung in guise of chandeliers, the wall hung with saucepans and kettles lined with glistening copper, the sounds which I used to hear in my first sleep, the cradle-songs, the dogs barking in the courtyard when the cattle moved in the barn or when the carter passed in the distance, his heavy cart crushing the stones, while his horses walking in step made the little bells on their collars sing *do fa, do re, mi do*—I dreamed of my mother, and of the poor children, all younger than I, who had died in the same year. My father, still a young man, putting me to bed while my mother nursed the last-born, and drawing over my face the coarse sheet of flax, which would save my skin from the flies who woke earlier than I.

"Here," I thought, "there are no flies, nor are there any sheets."

And I wondered innocently if great noblemen were accustomed to do without them. To every question which I asked myself, the growing torpor of sleep answered with its supreme indifference: what does it matter? A clear, silvery sound awoke me; it was the voice of the nightingale who lived in the garden opposite, and it reached me through the curtains and window panes with a feeble ray of moonlight.

I said to myself that the bird, who was an eloquent artist without having to take any trouble and without fear of a fiasco, a happy lover and accepted protector, was much happier on his branch than I upon swan's-down and satin, and I fell sound asleep; so sound that I heard no one enter the adjoining room, and was awakened by the noise of tongs stirring the fire in the salon. Some sudden inspiration which I cannot explain prevented me from calling: "Is that you, Léon?"—Had I slept long? The fire on my hearth had gone out, the moon had reached a position opposite the window, at which I had left one of the curtains partly drawn aside. I quitted the bed, I walked without a sound to the tapestry portière which separated me from the boudoir, and opened it a hair's breadth so that I could look through with due precaution. What I had foreseen had happened. A woman fashionably and richly dressed in black, and wearing a lace veil, had taken possession of the apartment. Was it the marchioness whom I had imagined? It was impossible for me to see her face, which was turned toward the fireplace and was not reflected in the mirror, that being hung very high in conformity with the general style of the place; but through the black lace I could distinguish a magnificent mass of fair hair and a superb neck. Her figure was flexible, slender without being frail, her movements firm, youthful and graceful. I could see all that, for she raised her arms to put out the candles which were still burning in the candelabra, she moved one of the easy-chairs away from the fireplace, drew up the other and placed a cushion under her feet. She had no light remaining but a single candle with a little blue shade, and she sat in an attitude of extreme weariness, almost out of sight in the great chair, leaving nothing visible except the outline of her dainty little foot before the fire. A small Russia leather bag and a long travelling coat of English waterproof material lay on the table. No other baggage, no lady's maid, no servant to look after her comfort. Evidently she was an intimate friend with whom they did not stand on ceremony, and to whom they had said as to me: "Come when you choose, you won't disturb anybody and nobody will put himself out for you." Some near relation of the master—his sister perhaps?—Certainly not his mistress, he would not have left her alone.

Whoever she might be, she was there in that room, she was cold, and she was doing as I did, warming herself before looking for a place to sleep. What would she think of that sheetless, blanketless bed which had puzzled me so? That was none of my business; but what did cause me very great perplexity was the other surprise that awaited her, when she found a prior occupant in that blue chamber upon which she seemed to reckon blindly, for she did not, as I had done, take the trouble to explore it.

A man does not think of taking advantage of such a situation when he is twenty years old and bears in his heart all the bashfulness and timidity of an ideal love. I thought only of the horror of the scene soon to take place, the shrieks of the woman believing that a trap had

been set for her, the absurdity of my apparent audacity, the awakening of my hosts at the uproar, the laughter or the reproaches, who could say which? An absurd situation for me, distressing to the woman, embarrassing to the master of the house. In an instant I revolved in my bewildered brain all possible means of leaving the room without a scandal; to escape by the window was hazardous but possible; but the window must be opened first and the woman would cry thief. It would be much worse if I should hide under the bed or in the curtains.

I had had time to make sure that there was no exit from the dressing-room. There was only one thing to do, and that was to show myself at once and explain everything in a few words, then vacate the premises. That is what I determined to do and I was preparing to do it, when the lady started at the sound of footsteps in the reception room and ran forward to meet a new arrival. I took advantage of this diversion to put the bed in order, put on my shoes and take up my bag and cloak, in order not to be caught in the act of usurpation of domicile.

I had not yet completed these hasty preparations, and was still seated on the tête-à-tête, convulsively pulling on my boots, when I heard in the boudoir a voice of too peculiar a ring to leave me in doubt as to its owner: it was Bellamare's voice. This unexpected circumstance reassured me although it complicated the problem. The lady, not being alone with me, would not be afraid, and I knew that Bellamare would explain my presence so quickly and satisfactorily that there would not be a moment's doubt as to the purity of my intentions. Moreover was it certain that the lady intended to remain there, might it not be simply a business appointment? Theatrical affairs are sometimes surrounded with the utmost secrecy. I resolved to wait for the end of the overture and not to listen; but the silence about us was so profound, and the wainscoted boudoir so resonant, that despite the pains the lady took to speak without disclosing the quality of her voice, it was impossible for me to lose a word of the dialogue, which I will try to repeat to you word for word.

"You were admitted without having to wait, were you not, Monsieur Bellamare?"

"And without being questioned, yes, madame; but I was told to make no noise."

"Yes, because of the next house, No. 23, which is occupied just now."

"I know it. Two of my company are staying there."

"Two? Ah! *mon Dieu!* who are they?"

"I fancy that you know neither of them."

"I know them all. I attended your performance at Orléans and Beaugency. Is—Monsieur Léon—"

"Yes, madame, Léon and Laurence."

"What a strange chance! I am so excited—I do not know if I shall

have the courage to tell you—*mon Dieu!* how extraordinary my conduct must seem to you! what an opinion you must have of me!”

“I am one of those men who have seen so many extraordinary things that they have ceased to be surprised at anything, and as for my opinion, that need not disturb you. I have not the honor of knowing you, I know neither your name, nor your rank, nor your province, nor where you live, as this is not your home; nor your age, nor your face, since you conceal it behind a veil. You wrote me that I could restore your peace of mind or make you happy. I understood perfectly that that meant a love-affair, and I did not dream for an instant that you had fallen in love with my forty years and my sun-burned face. Your letter was charming and urgent. I am humane and obliging, and I came. You asked me to keep your secret, I consider it a bounden duty to justify your confidence. I am at your orders, speak, come to the point without fear. The nights are short at this season, so waste no time if you don’t wish to be seen going away from here.”

“You seem so kind, and I know you to be so considerate, that I will take courage. I love a young man who belongs to your company.”

“Laurence or Léon?”

“Laurence.”

“He deserves to be loved, he is a most excellent and worthy fellow.”

“I know it. I have learned all that I possibly could about him as well as about you. I saw his debut; he attracted me. He didn’t display much of his talent that evening, he was frightened. His face appealed to me, his voice went to my heart. Another evening I saw him again, he was admirable, he made me tremble and shed tears. I felt that I loved him madly; but that secret would never have left my heart had it not been for the events that followed that performance.”

“The duel with Captain Vachard?”

“Precisely. I know that Vachard; he tried to pay court to me, I received him coldly for he was intensely disagreeable to me. Offended by the abruptness of my refusal, he slandered me. That is his habit, he is a dishonorable man. So that he had become hateful to me, although he had done me no harm. My life has been without reproach, I might even say without emotion; and not a single person who knows me believed his lies. But the men of the present day haven’t the chivalrous instinct, and there was not a single one among those who were my natural defenders, who dared to say to that man of the sword: ‘You lie!’—An actor, a mere youth, had to give him the lesson he deserved, apropos of another woman. From that moment I resolved to fight no more against the passion the artist had inspired in me, and to make him rich and happy—if he consents!”

“The devil! wealth and happiness; when a man can combine these two extremes, he always consents!”

“Stay a moment! he did not fight for me. I inquired as to all the details; he fought for one of his comrades, the fascinating Impéria,

with whom I should be in love, if I were a man, and whom I have applauded since with all my heart and in spite of everything. I am kind-hearted and I know how to be just. If those young people love each other, which is a very possible and very natural supposition, keep my secret; I have said nothing to you, and I will resign myself to the inevitable, I will conquer myself; it shall be as if I had felt nothing, had had no hope. But if, as some people say, there is absolutely nothing between them, if Laurence simply determined to enforce respect for the dignity of the profession in her person, why then you, who must know the truth, whose character and reputation have very great weight in my eyes, will reassure me and help me to make myself known to him."

"The last version is the true one. Impéria is an absolutely chaste young woman, yes, and decidedly shy. She has as much confidence in me as if I were her father. If Laurence had spoken to her of love, and she loved him, she would have taken me for a confidant and adviser. If he had spoken to her of love, and she had not reciprocated his feeling, she might perhaps have concealed it from me; but she would have treated him coldly and with distrust, whereas there is a tranquil and playful friendship between them."

"Then you are sure that he is not in love with her?"

"I believe that I am sure of it. I can make perfectly sure by watching him without saying anything, or by questioning him in your behalf."

"In my behalf? Oh! no, indeed, not yet! You must know something about me first—I am twenty-four years old, I am the daughter of an artist who left me some little property, I married a man with a title who had nothing, who did not make me happy, and who left me a widow at nineteen. I returned to my father, who also died last year, leaving me alone in the world; and since then I have lived in retirement. I am still in mourning. I adored my father; I have sworn that if I ever marry again I will marry an artist and it shall be for love. I have that right; I have the wherewithal, as the saying is; I have twenty thousand francs a year, a house, and all the refinements and comforts with which my father was able to surround himself. My husband did not have time to devour my dowry. So I am at liberty to choose, and I have chosen. It is for you to find out whether I deserve to be happy and am capable of inspiring love. Here are my name and address on this card; make inquiries. I have no fear of any investigation. As for my person, you must pass judgment upon that too; I remove my veil."

When she said that, I jumped from my seat, heedless of my situation, and the tête-à-tête creaked slightly and would have betrayed my presence, had not that faint noise been drowned by an exclamation from Bellamare.

"Ah! madame la comtesse," he cried, having probably cast his eyes first on the card, "you are as lovely as Laurence is handsome, and you would do very wrong to doubt your own omnipotence."

## A ROLLING STONE

I was behind the portière, I tried to open it again; but my hand trembled, and when I had succeeded in making an aperture for my eye it was too late: the infernal black veil, inhumanly opaque, had fallen back over my Galatea's face and bust. I stood there, not daring to look again, for although her back was turned to me, Bellamare, who was sitting at the opposite side of the fire, had moved so that he could see the tapestry if it stirred. Standing as if petrified, I listened to the conclusion of the dialogue.

"I am glad that my face pleases you, Monsieur Bellamare; when the time comes, you can tell him that I am not ugly."

"Ah! *fichtre!*" exclaimed Bellamare artlessly, well aware that the spontaneous expression of conviction never wounds a woman, "you are lovely enough to drive a man mad! Never fear! I will do as you wish. I will investigate prudently."

"Yes, most prudently, but most conscientiously too; I insist upon that, and when you are quite sure that I am a serious-minded person, who after much ennui, rational behavior and virtue, has admitted to her head and heart a noble folly and a profound passion, you will help me to make the man I have chosen for my husband accept my hand."

"You know that Laurence is only twenty-one at the most?"

"I know it."

"That his father is a peasant?"

"I know it."

"That he is passionately fond of the stage?"

"I know it."

"Very well. I cannot say that your choice is a reasonable one according to social standards—you yourself have anticipated and weighed that fact. You must have foreseen all that the world will say?"

"I have; do you blame me?"

"I, blame love, self-sacrifice, courage and unselfishness? On the contrary, I am tempted to kneel at your feet, madame la comtesse, and to say to you that, in my judgment, you have adopted the wise course. It has been my experience that what is conventionally called by that name leads to disappointment and regret—but here is daylight and I shall do well to withdraw."

"No, no, Monsieur Bellamare, I must be the one to go, and in great haste, for I must take the train that starts in an hour."

"Are you going to Tours?"

"No, I shall not follow you on your tour. My mind is at rest now, and I will go home to the country and wait until you write and say to me: 'I have found out all about you, Laurence's heart is entirely free, it is time to act.' Then, wherever you may be, you will see me. Adieu, and accept my warmest thanks for the good you have done me. I leave in your hands my honor and my pride. I have your promise, Laurence shall know nothing?"

"I swear it"

"Adieu again. I am going through the garden behind the house."



## A ROLLING STONE

This house belongs to a friend of mine, who is travelling and who must know nothing of this. A worthy woman who was in destitute circumstances and for whom I procured the place of caretaker here, will come soon and assist you to go out unseen. She is absolutely devoted to me and will not betray me."

Bellamare escorted the countess as far as the door of the reception-room. When he returned to the boudoir, he jumped into the air with amazement to find me seated in the chair he had just left.

### III

"I ask your permission," said Laurence, "to interrupt my story for a few moments. If you have not been bored to death so far, I am anxious to go on with it as accurately and frankly as I have succeeded in doing up to this point. My recollections thus far have been very distinct, because they were simple and had to do with a single engrossing subject. After the episode of the blue chamber, I had more than one subject of preoccupation, and I must have time to pick up the threads that led me out of the labyrinth in which I was lost so long."

"That is to say," I observed, "that you were in love with the lovely countess and the fascinating actress at the same time?"

"Yes and no, no and yes; perhaps, who knows? you will help me to read my own heart. Shall we walk a little? I am not in the habit of sitting still like this and of devoting so much thought to myself."

"Let us go back to the town," said I; "dine with me, and continue your story to-night or to-morrow, as you choose."

He agreed, but only on condition that I would go with him to his father's, whom he had not seen during the day, and who might be anxious about him. We walked quickly down the mountain, and, following the rapid course of the Valpie, were soon on level ground. Laurence led me as the crow flies through magnificent fields to the outskirts of the town, which were not much uglier and dirtier than the town itself. Between two pompous walls of manure we approached the house and domain of the elder Laurence, which was absolutely devoid of poesy, I assure you. The absence of womankind could be felt in every detail of the barnyard and the interior of the house, for one could not class with womankind the old hag who was carrying the liquid fertilizer to the garden in a watering-pot, pausing in her work from time to time to cast a glance at the soup-kettle, or stir it at need. Only the garden was well kept up, and there we found old Laurence digging a flower-bed. He was a man of seventy or thereabout, well preserved and remarkably handsome; but his face was devoid of expression and he was so deaf that he could not hear a cannon. He was able to exchange the few ideas that he had with no one but his son, who answered all his questions without raising his voice and by the aid of a mysterious sort of pantomime agreed upon between them.

## A ROLLING STONE

He understood that I was a well-intentioned visitor, and thought that I would take great interest in his vegetables, for he did not spare me a single turnip, and told me in detail, in an almost incomprehensible patois, the story of all his horticultural undertakings. Being unable to communicate my impressions to him, I bore my infliction patiently when I saw Laurence take possession and quickly turn over the rest of the bed which his father had begun. When he had finished, he came and set me free.

"You must excuse me," he said; "I had not done my stint to-day, and my poor old dad would have done too much, for he never complains, and punishes me only by working double."

I asked him if his circumstances were such as to make that necessary.

"No," he replied, "we have enough to live on without wearing ourselves out; but my father has a passion for the soil, and if he should allow himself a moment's repose, he would think that he had committed a crime toward it. He is a genuine peasant, as you see, and the world does not exist for him outside of his garden. The manure-heap which we are heaping up all about us is the horizon beyond which his thoughts do not extend, and he confines within it treasures of activity, patience, practical common-sense, foresight and resignation. If you should pass a day with him, you would love him in spite of yourself. He has all the virtues: gentleness, chastity, charity, self-sacrifice. He does not comprehend the sacrifice I made in returning to share his life; but, if it were necessary for him to make a still greater one for me, he would do it without hesitation. In a word, monsieur, I respect him and love him with all my heart. I was very glad to be able to show you his beautiful face and to tell you what I think of him, before resuming my story. We still have a good hour before your dinner. We shall be unmolested here; it is the day after a wedding-feast and all my comrades are tired out. I will take you to my microscopic oasis, for I have one which consoles me for the prosaic nature of my habits of life and of my habitation."

He led me to the farther extremity of the paternal estate, which lay on a gently sloping hillside, and was surrounded by walls high enough to shut off the view.

"Formerly this was a charming place of ours," he said. "We overlooked a beautiful landscape, and when, on my return from my last absence, my father proudly showed me this rampart which makes a tomb of it, saying: 'I hope you will be content here now,' I was terribly cast down; but he was so proud of his enclosure and of his young fruit trees against the wall, that I said nothing; but I reserved for my own use the part that I am going to show you, a bit of land of the size of your pocket-handkerchief, in which I take the keenest delight because nothing there has been spoiled or even touched."

He opened a small gate of which he had the key in his pocket,

## A ROLLING STONE

and we found ourselves on a narrow tongue of untilled land supported by a sort of shelf of large rocks.

"This is only the top," he said, when I had admired the view; "I own the underside also. Come down, but be a little careful."

He disappeared between two rocks. I followed him, and we descended perpendicularly, stepping from one projection to another, till we reached a little stream which disappeared in a fissure with no other sound than a mysterious lapping. We were in a sort of natural well, oval in shape, for the rocks at the top overhung so far on both sides as to form an arch over the stream, and the vegetation on the edges of the excavation was more luxuriant. Probably the fertilizers used in the market garden sweated through its walls, and the rain carried thither, despite the wall, the richest soil and the best seeds, for decorative plants were intertwined with wild flowers, which grew to an extraordinary size. At the bottom, fragrant wake-robin, stately papyrus, indescribably graceful cotoneasters, embraced or elbowed water plants, lilies and caltrops, which had taken root of themselves in a limpid pool, a sort of spring which lay like a liquid diamond above the bed of the stream. The little retreat was quite small, but of considerable depth, and the natural ornamentation was so graceful and rich that I was charmed by it.

"I call this my dungeon," said Laurence; "it is an abyss of flowers, rocks, moss and wild grass, to which I come to forget the past when it worries me too much. I lose myself in contemplation of a cluster of wild roses or a bunch of grasses, and I fancy that I have never lived any other life than that of the stones and leaves. They are as happy as they can be, living in their natural environment and undisturbed in their passive existence. Why should not I be as happy as they, when I have what they have not, the faculty of realizing my happiness? But I cannot remain long thus. I feel sometimes that, while my will says *yes*, the tears that fall in cowardly fashion on my idle hands say *no!*"

"Let us not stay here then. Don't tell me of your disappointments; perhaps they would destroy the virtue of your dungeon forever."

"Who knows? Perhaps just the opposite will happen! The thoughts one tries to drive from one's mind return all the more persistently. Perhaps I shouldn't have the courage to continue my story to-morrow, and I know that you must leave town early. I will swallow the bitter potion at a draught!"

And the gardener's son, having washed his soiled hands in the stream, resumed the story of his life as an actor in these words:

### CONTINUATION OF THE STORY OF THE ROLLING STONE

#### *The Shipwreck*

I left you in the boudoir adjoining the blue chamber, Bellamare

returning for his hat, I emerging from behind the tapestry portière and appearing before him like the statue of the Commander.

He was surprised, disturbed, annoyed; those emotions passed rapidly over his expressive features and blended at last in an irresistible roar of laughter.

"You understand," I said, "that I came here fully believing that it was No. 23; they shut me up; I did not understand it at all, but I fell asleep—"

"And you heard nothing?"

"I heard everything. I saw the lady, but not without her veil; I made out her figure, but I did not see her face."

"So much the worse for you! a perfect marvel! a blonde Forarina!"

"Are you in love with her, my dear manager?"

"Unselfishly in love."

"You would not marry her?"

"No, indeed."

"Why not?"

"Is it possible that you don't know that I am married?"

"Faith, no."

"Well, I am, and delighted to be, because if I were not, I might perhaps take a fancy to be married, and make a still greater mistake."

"Your wife?"

"Has gone to the devil, I don't know where; but she's not in question here. I am instructed to sound you cautiously. Fate laughs at the adorable countess's precautions. There is nothing left for me to do but question you, but not here, where we are neither under your roof nor hers. I know you to be an honorable man, I do not need to enjoin silence on you. Let us go out quietly, and don't you go to the next house now. Come to my hotel; we will talk on the way."

The old woman who let us out showed no curiosity, said not a word to us, and closed the door without a sound. When we were so far away that we did not fear to disturb the silence of that mysterious street, where the first rays of dawn were just beginning to appear, Bel-lamare began:

"Well, well, here's a pretty début in the career of love! I have nothing to tell you; as you know all, my mission is ended. It is for you to reflect and to ask yourself whether you agree that this first adventure shall be also the last in your life, for that is the lady's meaning, and she has the right to make that condition. What shall I tell her?"

"You would do better to advise me than question me," said I; "I cannot be in love with a woman whom I have not seen, and I am so taken by surprise and so bewildered that I haven't an idea in my head. What would you think, if you were in my place?"

"Do you want me to tell you how I argued with myself under similar circumstances?"

"Yes, I beg you to do so."

"I was young and no handsomer than I am now, but very fond of women; and women think a great deal of such passionate natures. So I had my share of triumphs in love, but triumphs as peculiar as my face and my cast of mind. A rich Englishwoman, a millionaire, whose niece I had fished out of the water while crossing the Lake of Geneva, fancied that she loved me and aspired to be loved by me. I asked nothing better, although I would have preferred the niece; but the niece, with the eyes of her fifteen years, considered me very ugly, and the aunt, who was something over thirty, wished to capture me and enrich me by taking me for her husband. I postponed my decision as long as possible; but when I saw that she persisted with the obstinacy which those islanders display in all their eccentricities, I packed my trunk and escaped from the gardens of Armida at daybreak. I never heard of milady again—she was a dear good creature by the way—and I preferred to marry a little Columbine with whom I was in love, who left me for a Toulousan Lindor, who could not speak the French language decently. I was a great fool to marry that hussy, but I was very wise to prefer her to the virtuous and romantic Englishwoman. Columbine, when she resumed her freedom of action, did not deprive me of mine. By preferring an ass to me she did not take away my wit: in short, by failing to appreciate my talent and my heart, she left both my heart and my talent intact."

"I understand," said I; "a woman who conferred wealth and consideration upon you would possess the right of life and death over you, morally speaking."

"And the more gentleness she displayed in monopolizing and subduing me, the more completely subjugated and enchained I should have felt, because I am loyal and kind-hearted, like you; but how miserable I should have been in the wadded cage of social proprieties! A comic actor who is not foolish in private life as well as on the stage soon drifts into melancholy and suicide. Indeed, I have spurned wealth, and more than once, under other forms than that of marriage. I have never been willing to wear chains of any sort, and everybody thinks that I have made a mistake; but I say that I am right about it, because I still feel young and lively. Don't tell me your opinion of my course, for that is unnecessary; think of your own case. You are handsome and not comic. The lady upon whom you have made an impression seems as serious as a person can be in love; you have not as yet gone deeply enough into the life of the stage, to have any ineradicable regrets on leaving it. You are ambitious perhaps without knowing it, and capable of playing a part on the stage of the real world. If that is so, marry, my dear child, marry! Life is an inclined plane; it is the destiny of some to go down into the plains where gold and grain grow; of others to go up to the barren rocks where they reap no harvest except wind and clouds. Try cutting a caper or two with your fancy; you will see then whether it is heavy or light, whether it tends

to roll in the dust of the practical or to be whisked away by the frolicsome breeze. And now let us go and take a nap."

I followed him without making any reply, fatigued and uncertain. I threw myself on the bed and found no solution of my perplexities.

Bellamare slept two or three hours, then prepared to leave Blois with Impéria and Anna, who had entirely recovered.

"I will leave you here to your own devices until tomorrow," he said; "join Léon and see the sights of the town with him. Indeed, you may as well ask his advice, without mentioning No. 25, of course, and without giving him any details, any hint which can possibly lead to his identifying the lady hereafter. However, Léon is as reliable as I am myself, he is a serious-minded young man, with a finely-tempered spirit. His advice should have more weight with you than mine."

"Won't you tell me the countess's name?"

"Never, unless she gives me permission to do so. By the way, I am instructed, you remember, to find out whether your heart is still free? Is it, or is it not?"

At that moment Impéria came from her room, carrying her little worn and faded carpet-bag, and gathering the folds of her travelling cloak about her to conceal the shabby cuffs of her dress. The contrast between that modest poverty and the opulence of the lady whom I had seen dimly through her rich lace veil struck me like a revelation of my own instinct. Was I ambitious? Was I susceptible to the prestige of luxury, which is alluring to eyes that are not used to it? Was poverty repugnant to me? Could I imagine any enjoyment that wealth could provide which would make me forget my sweet comrade's beloved face? My heart spontaneously and with all its strength cried *no*.

"Well," said Bellamare in an undertone, "I asked you if your heart is free. Are you deaf?"

"Faith," I replied in the same tone, "madame la comtesse is too inquisitive."

Bellamare took my arm, led me two or three steps away from Impéria, and said to me:

"If you are thinking of her you cannot think of the other surely?"

I dared not reveal my secret to Bellamare. I dreaded too much that he would be against me. I answered that I was free in every respect, and that I should certainly think twice before I abandoned so great an advantage.

"You will join us at Tours to-morrow, will you not?" said Impéria as they entered the train; "remember that we shall not dare to take a step without Léon and you."

"Haven't you *the others* and our dear manager?"

"Our dear manager will be too busy getting us all settled, and *the others* are all very well, but *they are not you*. Adieu! Enjoy yourselves and don't forget us."

She took her leave of me with such an air of innocent affection, that the emotion of the blue chamber seemed to me an empty dream.

You would have said that Impéria divined my plight; and I succeeded in persuading myself that her eyes said to me: "Do not love anyone but me."

I said nothing to Léon. As soon as I ceased to be in doubt as to my course, I had no need to consult him. I talked to him only of himself. His friend at No. 23 was a young man of good family, exceedingly well-informed and sedate for a man of leisure. We visited the château of Blois together, and he told us its history at length and most entertainingly. In the evening he proposed that we should stay at home and talk, over a bowl of punch and an excellent cigar. In that tranquil conversation I learned for the first time the cause of Léon's mysterious self-absorption.

Léon was no longer a child; he was thirty-two years old, he had seen much of life and had learned a great deal. The stage had always been his dominant passion. He loved all its fiction and accepted no part of it as real. It was the spirit, not the letter, which sustained him. He loved all his parts, in the same sense that he worked them all out in his mind, and, while taking great pains with his external appearance, his make-up and costume, he always went upon the stage with the conviction that he really was the character he represented; but at the same time he detested them all, because they were not conceived and written according to his ideas. In a word, he was too much of a master to be a virtuoso, too deeply versed in letters to be an interpreter of others' thoughts, and he never ceased to kick inwardly against his task, although he would never abandon it and could think of nothing outside of his cherished yet hateful profession.

He wrote, as I have told you, and I was always convinced and am still that he had genius, but genius of the most unfortunate type that a man can have—genius without talent. His plays were brimful of originality, of vigorous outbursts, of strong and simple situations; they had the stamp of grandeur and the rigid honesty of method which we find in the great masters of the past. Despite these superior qualities, they were impossible for the most part; they would have had to be remoulded entirely and to some extent translated, to make them intelligible to the public. If played before ten or a dozen men of letters, they would have delighted them; but every large audience contains a majority of ignorant or indolent persons who can neither think, nor compare, nor remember, nor divine. In the provinces above all, one must leave nothing to the interpretation of the common herd; they go too far when they undertake to interpret, and are horribly scandalized at things that would not offend serious and cultivated minds.

Léon was a little put out because Bellamare had never chosen to give one or two of his works, and because he had insisted upon extensive changes and cutting. He declared that it was the duty of an intelligent man, a real artist like our manager, to try to instruct and train the public, to create a public for himself if necessary, no matter where, rather than submit to the wretched taste and be led in chains

by the ignorance of the ready-made public of every province. Bellamare replied thus to his reproaches:

"Give me a theatre and a subsidy of a hundred thousand francs, and I will promise to produce your plays and those of every unknown author who furnishes proof of genius or talent, even though the plays are certain to fail. I should not put a sou in my own pocket, and I should be very happy to be working in the interest of art; but with nothing one can do nothing."

Léon hung his head. He did not blame Bellamare; he esteemed and loved him; but he blamed the times and the men of the times; he despised the age in which he lived; he felt confined, and dragged himself about like a condemned man who does not deserve his fate. He would make no concessions to the vulgar, and his friend at Blois encouraged him to maintain the pride of his genius. For my own part I felt that that genius was too incomplete to show such intolerance; but I dared not tell him so, for he told himself so, he realized it, and that was the real cause of his depression. He had the thirst for the beautiful, and he could not find in himself the spring at which the man endowed with true genius slakes his thirst without seeking the assistance of others.

As for myself, I was no better at Tours than at Beaugency, nor did Vendôme witness the blooming of my histrionic talent. Other towns in which Bellamare made and lost money paid little heed to me. At the very best I was passable. I did not mar the general effect, but I added nothing to its brilliancy, and my comrades no longer entertained any illusions with respect to me. Bellamare, always fatherly, assured me that I was of use to him. But I could not replace Lambesq, who was insufferable to him, and he could not dismiss him until the end of our tour. It came to an end, and nothing had happened to justify the hope I had entertained of becoming Impéria's husband and staff. She was to return to the Odéon, and I could not dream of seeking an engagement at that theatre. There were many actors there as colorless as I, but they came from the Conservatoire. Bocage did not like them. He said that, unless they were blessed with some special talent, they were all sealed with the same wafer and incapable of relaxing their stiff lines under his instruction; but those pupils had rights and I had none. I did not choose to take any useless steps. I aspired to nothing more than to retain my entrée at the theatre in order to be near Impéria. Moreover, the vacation season was approaching and my father expected me. I parted with my comrades at Limoges, and Bellamare there offered to engage me for the winter, which he expected to pass in the north of France, or to obtain an engagement for me in some company that was permanently established in some large town. I thanked him. I preferred to continue my studies at Paris for the present, and not to be separated from Impéria. Her friendship, in default of her love, was my sole joy, and I still had hopes, although I did not know by what road I should reach the point where I might



offer her my life.

I alleged as a pretext my desire to consult my family before adopting the dramatic career definitively. Bellamare approved.

"We will consider the matter settled for the moment," he said. "If you change your opinion, come and join me. You can always find out where I am by writing to the Odéon. Indeed, it will suffice for you to send your letters to Constant, he will forward them to me; but we have another account to settle. I haven't mentioned the countess again and you have asked no questions about her; we have both done our duty. I waited for you to take the initiative, and perhaps you waited for me; however that may be, as we are about to separate, we must have an understanding with regard to her."

"Haven't you written to that lady yet?"

"Yes, indeed, I wrote her the truth. I wrote her that you involuntarily overheard her confidential communication to me, but that you knew neither her name nor her face. I added that you seemed to me to be uncertain, that I had advised you to reflect, and that I would not leave you without asking you the result of your reflections. Speak, for the time has come."

"Tell her," said I, "that I am deeply touched and grateful; that her charms made an impression on me, although through impenetrable draperies; that I saw the tip of a divine foot and the golden glint of regal tresses. Do not say that that hair may have been false, and that it is difficult to fall in love with a woman who hides her face and even the tone of her voice; but you can say to her that the evident good faith with which she spoke filled me with confidence and respect. Yes, tell her that, for it is the truth, and the more I have thought of it, the more esteem I have felt for her. You need not add that, if she had not mentioned marriage—But this serious subject has made me serious, and you can conclude by saying to her that I am too young to accept such an exalted destiny without dismay. One must have an overweening self-conceit to deem himself worthy of it and to be sure of deserving it always."

"Very good," cried Bellamare, "you have dictated a letter in which I do not propose to change a single word; haven't you in your heart a little postscript of regret to soften the solemn seriousness of your refusal? for it is a refusal, there's no gainsaying it, and who knows that you won't repent it in two or three years?"

"My dear manager, I have been awaiting your advice in a state of perplexity of which you do not guess the true reason; it is this: if you really believed that I had talent, you would have said to me without hesitation: 'Don't bother about countesses, but study your rôles!' Your silence proves to me how little faith you have in my artistic future. So it is possible that I foolishly am acting in terminating my charming adventure by a refusal; but, without having thought much about it, I am inclined to think that I must make up my mind to it, or play the rôle of a *précieux ridicule* and of a man who doesn't mean

what he says. I am too young to be a Don Juan; I should try in vain to abuse the advantage which chance has given me over that woman, to deceive her; I could not do it. I prefer to confess my ingenuousness and to console myself with her esteem."

"Very good," rejoined Bellamare, "good again! You are a heart of gold in very truth, and I still hope that you will make an actor. Consult your family, you must do that, and if they leave you at liberty, wait until the close of the season at the Odéon, when I shall go to Paris for a few weeks as usual. We will resume our lessons all alone, and I have an idea that I shall succeed in bringing out of you, in gesture, expression and tone, all the beauty and worth that there is in you."

I wept when I left him. All my comrades embraced me; Moranbois alone turned his back on me and shrugged his shoulders when I would have embraced him with the rest.

"Have I injured you in any way?" I asked him; "have you no longer any regard for me?"

"You lied to me!" he retorted in his most contemptuous tone. "I am donkey enough to like you, but you are a hog to leave me just when we are beginning to be attached to you! That's just like you young fellows! always ungrateful!"

"I am not Léonce," I replied, embracing him whether he would or not; "if I ever resemble him, I authorize you to despise me."

As for Impéria, she seemed to me to be much more engrossed by a new rôle which she was studying than by my departure, and I was so deeply wounded that I determined to go without bidding her adieu. She was at the theatre with Anna, rehearsing a scene with great earnestness; but just as I entered the diligence, I saw her run up breathlessly with her companion. They brought me a pretty memento which they had embroidered for me in the wings during the rehearsals, and Impéria said good-bye to me with a tearful smile which placed me in her possession again, body and soul.

My father was overjoyed to see me, and hardly asked me a question as to my employment of my time. Seeing that I was studious and apparently content with my lot, he made no attempt to understand why I had travelled all summer.

But I was in a desperate frame of mind, and for the first time my native town, my home, my mode of life were unendurable to me. I realized the gulf that separated me from the companions of my boyhood, and the vulgarity of my normal environment wounded me, as if it were an unjust act on the part of destiny. On reflection I soon realized that it was not the fault of the environment if I no longer accepted it, nor my fault if it could no longer content me. All the mischief was due to my father's innocent ambition to bring me up above my station. In order to rise above it really, not only years of earnest work were necessary, and a courage proof against every trial—I felt quite capable of that—but also a certain intellectual superiority; and my far from brilliant dramatic attempt had made me exceedingly

doubtful of myself. You will tell me that this was not reasonable; that, the stage being a well-defined specialty, my awkwardness and timidity ought not to discourage me with respect to my prospects at the bar, which requires special powers of a very different sort. I was convinced, and I still believe that the two are but one, and that I should be an even worse advocate than I was an actor.

By tormenting myself with this dread, I put the finishing touch to my inability to overcome it, and I conceived a profound distaste for my legal studies. I had not the means to purchase a solicitor's or a notary's office. I was quite as willing to be a gardener as a chief clerk forever and a day. I did not care to think of the magistracy, for we were embarked upon a political current which was leading the way to a dictatorship; I had the opinions of my age and all the ardor of an artist. I did not choose to have recourse to the patronage of my uncle, the baron and deputy, nor to that of any of the bigwigs of my department. To obtain their support, I should have had to pledge myself to support a reactionary government which my effervescent brain did not accept, and in the duration of which the youth of that day did not believe.

We are not here to talk politics. I know nothing about your opinions, and I have no reason to advertise mine to you; but I must tell you that my nature has never become civilized in the matter of moral independence, and that, in that respect, I had made no mistake in adopting the life of an actor: but I should have had to legitimize by genuine talent that ambition to be free—and perhaps I had no talent at all. What was I to do? It was so much the worse for me!

Ennui was consuming me, for of all causes of ennui irresolution is the most burdensome. I was heart-broken because my destiny seemed to have no goal, and because I did not know how to employ my activity, my intelligence, my facility in learning, my memory, the powers of my temperament, my heart and my brain. I had expected to feel that I was someone, that I might become something, and suddenly I found nothing but helplessness and discouragement within me—nothing but obstacles and precipices about me. Léon's malady was infecting me, and I felt the horror of it.

There are thousands of young men in that position, for the man of the people, as soon as he is a little above destitution, aspires to raise his children higher than himself. Sons of noble families, whose position is all made beforehand, do not know what we suffer at the triumphant age when we have done with the abhorrent slavery of the college, to take possession of a liberty which leads only to disaster, unless by favor of a mighty effort or an improbable chance. That one of us who succeeds, simply does his duty in the eyes of the parents who have sacrificed themselves for him; he who succumbs from lack of intelligence and energy is harshly condemned. Too much is done for us, and too little. It would be much better to give less and to demand less.

## A ROLLING STONE

My father was not the man to condemn me thus; but I knew what he would suffer if I should fail, and I wondered if it were not my duty to argue him out of his chimera of lifting me above my station, before his hopes took deeper root. There was still time to tell him that I did not feel the vocation which he had unwarrantably attributed to me, that I had tried speaking in public and spoke very badly; in short, that I preferred to assist him in his work and learn his trade under his direction. Certainly I ought to have done so then; but, on the one hand, love held me fast, and with it the desire to follow the footsteps of my idol; on the other, manual labor, to which I had never been accustomed, filled me with terror, and I could not overcome the disgust inspired by that brutalizing sort of occupation when I turned my thoughts upon it. I felt quite capable of resigning myself to do nothing with my will rather than enslave it thus. I was wrong, monsieur, I was absolutely mistaken: the idea of accepting a life of indolence is the most deplorable idea that can enter a human brain. I did not suspect the power that the heart has in reserve when it has determined to defend itself; but what can you expect? I was too young to know anything about that.

Amid all these secret anxieties, I received—and on the same day, mark that—two letters which I have just been to my chamber to get, and which I will read to you. The first is from Impéria.

LA HAYE, Oct. 1, 1850.

My dear Comrade,

“You promised to write to us, and we are beginning to be disturbed by your silence. Monsieur Bellamare bids me tell you so, and I add my reproaches to his. Have you so soon forgotten your companions, your friends, your fatherly manager, and your little sister Impéria, who cannot believe without regret that such is the case? No, it is impossible. Either you are so happy with your family that you cannot steal an hour from them and devote it to us, or you have some secret trouble which you don’t wish to mention to us until after the cause is removed: it may be that some of your people are ill, your father, perhaps, whom you love so dearly and of whom you have always spoken to me so affectionately? But do take a moment to reassure us all, and if it is pleasure of any sort, vacation trips, hunting, family parties, which monopolize you, we shall be very glad to know, and will excuse a short letter.

“At the risk of wearying you at a time when you will take no great interest in what I say, I must give you in my letter a few details concerning the rest of us. I will begin with myself, for you will be surprised to see, from the postmark that I am not in Paris.

“The explanation is that I suddenly formed a momentous resolution early in the year. The Odéon had reengaged me on my own terms, and a few days after you said farewell to us at Limoges, Monsieur Bellamare received my contract, signed by Monsieur Bocage,

and lacking only my own signature. I had reflected, I realized that, having increased my little salary, they would demand from me progress which I had not made; then I remembered how much it costs to live in Paris and how dismal it is there when one is alone in the world! My heart was broken at the idea of leaving for three-fourths of the year the troupe which has become my family and with which I am so happy, to shut myself up in my little damp, dark Parisian bedroom, where my health suffered so last year, and where, if I happened to have a longer illness, I should be reduced to the necessity of receiving alms from my comrades or from the concierge, or of dying alone in my corner like a bird that has fallen from its nest. In short, Paris frightened me, both for the present and for the future. If I am ever to have any talent, I shall not acquire it there, having no means of paying a good teacher and being unwilling to owe my success to his charity. I am distrustful, as you know, when I do not know people, and I take refuge under those wings where I am sure of being undisturbed. So I begged Monsieur Bellamare to keep me as a pupil and a member of his company, and, after exhausting his generous eloquence in an attempt to prove to me that I was acting against my own interests, he was good enough to consent. So you will not see me at Paris this winter, and perhaps not next winter, for I have not the ambition sometimes attributed to me to seek fortune there and attract attention. I seem to be more on my own level in these provincial cities where the public does not demand so much, and where we do not remain long enough to give people time to get tired of us. I feel that I have a decided Bohemian streak in me, as I have told you. It is a matter of modesty and good sense, as well as of taste.

“Now you know all about me. I pass to the other characters in our *roman comique*. Anna is still with us and still charming as an actress, sweet as a friend and companion, although Moranbois has no more indulgence than of old for her sick-headaches. The said Moranbois has not toned down the color of his manners, but he has ceased to consider me avaricious and selfish, and at heart he is the best of men. Léon has finished a melodrama which sounds very fine to me when he reads it, but is as unactable as the others. I am inclined to think, however, that we might risk it here. The impassive Batavians, who listen to us with religious attention, apparently not understanding a word that we say, would accept the most eccentric works as submissively as the other novelties of our repertory. Anything would pass muster with them; I believe that the hiss is an invention of which they have never heard. To be sure, they are also ignorant of the use of applause, and if you had not all those huge faces glistening with health before your eyes, you would think that you were acting in a desert. There are times, I assure you, when their immobility, the fixed stare of their glassy eyes, the absolute indifference of their faces, all of which have exactly the same coloring, produce the effect of an assemblage of wax figures all made in the same mould and utilized to fill an

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empty hall and represent an audience. There is something ghastly about it which makes your blood run cold and your voice break; so that I am worse here than I have ever been.

“Lambesq’s place has been taken by Mercoeur, a *guirlandeur* as we say, who imitates Frédéric Lemaître—well, so that you would never be deceived; but he is an excellent man, with a wife and children, who works like a horse, and roars like a lion with a cold in his head. Little Marco improves every day. He is the most successful of us all with the public, to whose heart the buffoon is always dear. He is a thoroughly good fellow, who loves you and regrets your absence much.

“Lucinde is in winter quarters at her wine-merchant’s; he has lost his wife, and she says that she is going to marry him. What does it matter? In her place we have Camille, who used to be pretty and still has talent. Purpurino has very little to do since Marco has taken his rôles. He is pining away with jealousy; to console him, Bellamare has promised to let him recite Thérèse’s speech at the next benefit. That is all, I believe. I close by pressing both your hands, and I say nothing of the possibility of your return to the ambulatory sheepfold. Our manager proposes to write to you at the first leisure moment he can seize by the hair.

“For myself and for your other loyal and devoted comrades,  
“IMPÉRIA.”

At first it seemed to me that I was born again as I read those little fly-tracks. I kissed them a thousand times, I watered them with my tears, I interpreted to suit my own desires their merriment, their playful kindness. I had to read the other letter in order to appreciate the emptiness and coldness of the first. Listen to it:

“Monsieur B— has written at last—You say no. It is really so; it shall be no to me also. Without anger, without shame, without despair, I accept the decree of your sincerity, and I appreciate the more fully your noble character. It may be that I should have been shocked with myself if you had said yes; but now I am altogether reassured and very proud of my choice, for, whether you wish it or not, you will continue to be the man whom I chose, whom I wished to attract, whom I respect, whom I love. You will never hear of me again, and you will not have the sorrow of learning that I have died of my love. On the contrary, I shall live on it. It will be the one great event, the real romance, the beautiful and cherished memory of my woman’s life. I do not know what that life will be with respect to the world which surrounds me, but I know that there will be no more terror nor ennui in the depths of my revived heart. There will be a certainty, an all-engrossing thought, faith, affection, gratitude; there will be *you*, to-day and forever.

“THE UNKNOWN OF BLOIS.”

Excuse me if I do not show you her handwriting; I can assure you, however, that it is distinct, firm, refined and flowing. It is as legible as the mind of a child, as a mother's heart. It made my heart beat fast, as if I felt that sincere and generous hand rest upon my head, and as if the mysterious voice which I had heard in the blue chamber said in my ear: "Fool that you are, how can you hesitate or doubt?"

I read Impéria's letter again. It told me very plainly that the thought of seeing me in Paris had not had the slightest weight as against the distaste and horror of the life that awaited her there. Whether from modesty, or from the instinct of veracity, she spoke of friendship only as the mouthpiece of the whole company; but the heart, which might adroitly or involuntarily have insinuated a little note of its own into the concert, had neither revealed nor betrayed itself. She manifested no desire to summon me back to the ambulatory fold. I had fought for her and had never mentioned the word love to her; she was grateful to me for that. She cared enough for me to write to me, but the whole company had seen her letter and the whole world might see it. What she said of her regard for her companions in Bohemia was meant for them and not for me.

Moranbois was right. She would never love anyone; being as cold and prudent as her talent, she needed the strolling actor's life to thaw her out a little and prevent her from being bored to death by her own prudence. It was not the actor's art that she loved, but the constant movement and distraction which were essential to modify her shrinking and frigid temperament.

What strange freak, what mania had drawn me toward her? Why had I scorned this stranger, who was not afraid to reveal the lowest depths of her heart? I possessed the whole heart, the intoxicating secret of an invisible woman whose name I did not know; the real unknown was the comrade who addressed me in familiar terms only in the excitement of our daily studies, and who had invented a mysterious love, which she did not feel, to conceal the ghastly emptiness of her heart.

Without hesitation, without reflection, yielding to my first impulse, I took two sheets of paper, and wrote on one: *Good luck to you!* on the other: *I adore you!* I addressed the first to Impéria, the other to "the stranger," and placed them both, sealed, in an envelope addressed to Bellamare; but as I was about to close this last, my courage forsook me. I took out the three words intended for Impéria. I persuaded myself that I was too proud to show her my mortification. I decided to postpone any explanation with her, and wrote to Bellamare, pretending not to have received her letter:

"You seem to have forgotten me. I have just learned where you are. I want to tell you that I still love you like a father, and to ask you

to remember me kindly to my comrades. Will you be good enough to forward to the unknown person whom you know the enclosed note?"

The letter was despatched. I surmounted the terror which my audacity caused me. My hand trembled as I dropped into the box those three words for the countess, which, perhaps, put fetters on my conscience and my life forever. I realized it, but I persisted. It was soothing to my pride to break with Impéria. I gloated over it as a sort of revenge which I dared not mention to her, which did not touch her in any way, which would have made her laugh if she had known of it, and which was likely to rebound cruelly on myself alone; but it gratified my pride and relieved me, according to my own idea, of a year of constraint and torture.

This state of mind lasted several days; then it occurred to me that I must answer Impéria's letter. I succeeded in writing her a long epistle of the merriest and most foolish sort. I was very coquettish in it, and I really believe that the wrath I had vanquished sharpened my wits. I expressed the same degree of attachment which she had meted out to me so accurately, and manifested no desire to join her. I burned my ships once more, and believed that I had burned them for the last time.

This episode renewed my desire to work. If the countess accepted my change of position and understood that spontaneous outcry of my heart, I must employ the time which I must still spend apart from her in making myself worthy of her. That did not necessitate my being admitted as an advocate and demonstrating my possession of a talent which it was doubtful if I possessed; but I must study law in order not to be unfitted for the conflicts of everyday life, and I must at the same time develop and embellish my intellect as much as possible in every direction. So I went to work with a sort of frenzy. I procured all the serious books which I was able to borrow in the province. I began to learn, all by myself, languages, music, drawing and natural history, resolved to pass the following year in Paris and to take as many lessons as my patrimony would pay for and as the days would hold. My father, who was so proud to see me read and write occasionally, was speechless with admiration when he saw me reading and writing day and night. He had no idea of such a thing as weariness of the brain.

I awaited anxiously the result of my declaration to the countess. I was disappointed to receive no reply. The vacation came to an end. I started for Paris with no well-defined plan; but having taken a liking to work, being impelled by self-love, and determined to atone for my failure on the stage by obtaining some measure of success at something else, I kept my promise to myself; I kept aloof from my former companions, I shut myself up with my books, and went out only to attend lectures or private lessons. I had been in Paris about a month when I received these few lines from *her*:



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"I have been travelling. On my return I find your note. How it disturbs me! What does it mean? Explain yourself; why was it no? why is it now yes?"

"Answer me under the name of Mademoiselle Agathe Bouret, *poste restante*, Paris. In two days I shall receive your letter."

I replied:

"I love you without having seen you. I love you in spite of all that separates us. When I heard your voice at Blois, I was bewitched. Your letter drove away the vain phantom. It seized me as the waves seize the shipwrecked man and do with him as they will. I was mad when I presumed to tell you of my love. I am mad still to presume to repeat it. I degrade myself, I efface myself in your eyes when I confess to you that I am only a derelict; I ruin my prospects perhaps; but I prefer to conceal nothing from you. You divined and named the woman whom I loved. She does not know it, she never divined it, she will never know it; and now you will see in me only what I am, a child! aye, but a child who longs to become a man and who is working ardently to know, to understand, to be. Do not say to me again that I must give you my name and accept your fortune, which humiliates me and drives me to despair. Tell me that you will love me still, that you will write to me, that you will give me courage, that you will permit me to love you. Love, love, let us talk of naught but love! That is all that I understand and feel, the rest is a dream!"

A week later she wrote to me:

"Impéria is adorably pretty, distinguished, charming. I know who she is; she belongs to a greater family than mine. She is destined to restore by her talent the brilliancy of her destiny, tarnished by a sin with which she had no concern. You loved her, that was certain to happen. She did not discover it—a proof that she is chaste and that you have a profound respect for her. And you dare not tell her of your love! that denotes the greatest love that a man can feel! Would you like me to tell her? It would be my greatest joy and pride now to assure her future welfare by uniting her to a man who is worthy of her. It is impossible that she should not love you. Do not struggle against yourself; if you do, you may lose that sincerity of dealing with yourself which now constitutes the charm, the grandeur of your noble and generous heart. Remain as you are; as you are, I will love you as a sister loves her brother, as a mother loves her child, since you are still a child. Say the word, and I will go at once to La Haye, I will explain everything to Bellamare, and we will work together cunningly, delicately, resolutely for you. I will bring Impéria to you and join your hands, and then I will make myself known."

That letter crushed me. I realized that I was lost. My unknown was the bravest, the most generous of women, but she was a woman. I had made a mistake in being sincere; she distrusted my confession, she no longer believed in me. She sent me back to Impéria; she wrote to me remorselessly in effect the very words I had almost written to Impéria: *Good luck to you!* that is to say, love whom you choose. Haughty and superb in the realm of romance, she chose to play the leading rôle, and disdained to enter into a struggle. She would not assist me to fight against a possible relapse, or take the trouble to banish an ill-disguised regret. She had had the energy to offer herself, she had not that which was requisite to win me from another.

As I recalled all that I had heard in the blue chamber, I realized that her behavior expressed that same mixture of courage and prudence. She had insisted upon knowing if my heart was entirely free, if she could take possession of it without risk; she would not allow anything to be said to me until that essential point was made clear to her. Doubtless Bellamare had satisfied her in that respect, and so she ascribed my refusal simply to the modest pride of a poor devil terrified by a rôle far beyond his powers; that is why she had written me that adorable letter which had vanquished me, and which left her soaring above me in the serene strength of her unselfish attachment. I should have understood, I should have held my peace and allowed the sincere and discriminating confidant of our loves to act for us. I had not dared to confide my secrets to the excellent Bellamare. He was too close to Impéria. He might perhaps have allowed her to guess that I loved her—or that I had ceased to love her.

What reply should I have made to the countess? I do not know, but I was unable to make any. I tried in vain. Every outburst of love, every protestation of sincerity which I tried to put in words buried me deeper in the slough of humiliation. I no longer seemed to myself to have the power to convince her; my confidence had flown away with hers. She treated me as a hesitating child, almost an untruthful child; I wondered if she were not right, if she did not read me more clearly than I read myself. How can a man write or speak when he knows that every word will give rise to a well-founded and logically established suspicion? It seemed to me that I stood before her as I had stood before the public at my debut, when, at every halting, lifeless word, I fancied that I could hear every spectator shout back at me: "Wretched mummer! you feel nothing of what you are saying!"

I did not answer her; that is to say, I wrote twenty, perhaps thirty letters, and burned them all. And whenever I burned one I was content, and said to myself:

"Don't go into a fight in which you will be beaten. Even if that woman loved you enough to relieve you from the nightmare of an ill-assorted marriage, and to give herself to you, she will resume possession of herself sooner or later; she is the stronger because she is the calmer, because her rôle takes precedence of yours and overshadows

it. You will love her passionately, madly, with the tempestuous energy of youth and the blunders of inexperience. She, always generous on principle, will crush you with her gentleness, her oblivion of the past, her disdain perhaps! No, a hundred times no! tear her out of your imagination, and if the fascination of her overture to you has really invaded your heart, crush your heart rather than debase it."

I adhered to my determination and did not write to her again. Once more I plunged desperately into work. I held aloof from pleasure of every sort, I forbade myself the theatre, I was seen no more in the stalls or the wings of the Odéon. I acquired, not much knowledge, but many notions, and I realized with mingled pleasure and dismay that I learned everything readily, that I was adapted for anything, that is to say adapted for nothing. The winter passed thus. I thought no more of Impéria, I believed that I was cured of my passion for her. As the spring drew near, I began to feel some disturbance in my tired brain, fits of vertigo and distaste for food. I would not pay any heed. In April, as the same trouble recurred, I took a long walk in the sunlight in the suburbs of Paris, expecting to cool my blood by violent exercise. On returning home I took to my bed with brain fever.

Between sleep and delirium, I have no idea what happened to me. One morning, I became conscious of a feeling of deadly prostration. I recognized my own room. I thought that I was alone, and I went to sleep with the feeling that I wanted to sleep; I was saved.

I dreamed; distinct images succeeded the shapeless, nameless phantoms which had whirled me about with them in the chaos of madness. I saw Impéria. She was in a garden full of flowers, and I was sent to call her to the rehearsal, which was going on in another adjoining garden. I rose and called her in a feeble voice. I was still dreaming wide awake.

"What do you want, my dear friend?" replied a sweet voice, which belonged to no phantom. And my dear comrade's lovely face appeared to me, stooping over mine.

I closed my eyes, thinking that I was dreaming again; I opened them when I felt her little hand on my forehead, wiping away the perspiration. It was she, it was really she, I no longer had the fever, I was not wandering. She had been there three days. She nursed me as if I were her brother; Bellamare and Moranbois, who had come with her to Paris to make their annual enlistments, took turns with her in watching by my bedside. Then she rested in the adjoining room, she did not leave the house at all. She told me all this, forbidding me to be astonished or to ask any questions.

"You are saved," she said. "You need much rest, and you have nothing to do; we are here and we shall not leave you until you are able to walk. Don't thank us; it is our duty to help you, and a pleasure too, now that we are no longer anxious."

She used the familiar form of address for the first time, whether from a feeling of maternal affection or because she had adopted in

their entirety the habits of the ordinary strolling player, which were decidedly unconventional in those days. I covered her hands with kisses, I wept like a child, I adored her, I forgot to reason.

She helped me to drink a little lemonade which she prepared with her own hands. Cupping glasses had been applied to my shoulders, and she dressed the blisters as a sister of charity would have done. I am not sure that, while my faculties were in abeyance, she did not perform the humblest duties of a nurse for me. That pure-minded and reserved maiden had no false shame or disgust by a sick bed. She waited upon me as she had probably waited upon her father.

This boundless charity is a virtue which it is impossible to deny to actors in general. Impéria had brought it with her into that environment in which she was not born, and she exercised it with all the sweetness of her refined, thoughtful and considerate nature. Good Régine, who had returned to the Odéon, also came to help to nurse me, but she was too zealous and too noisy. I really felt better only when Impéria was with me. Anna paid me a very affectionate little visit; but she had a jealous lover who would not permit her to come again.

One evening Moranbois said to Impéria:

“Princess”—he always called her by that title, with a half respectful, half-derisive expression—“you are pale and yellow, not to say green. You are tired; I want you to go home, go to bed and have one good night’s sleep. I will take charge of your patient and answer for his comfort. Off with you! Moranbois has said it, it is Moranbois’s will!”

I added my entreaties to his. She had to yield; but while she prepared my potions and minutely explained to Moranbois how they were to be administered, I wept like a baby who has promised his mother to be very good, but who is grieved and terrified when the time comes for her to leave him. Luckily I concealed my face in my sheets, and no one saw my poor childish tears.

That was my first deception. Soon, as I regained the power of reflection, I indulged freely in stratagem. They often talked about me under their breath in my room, and the dull torpor of convalescence made me indifferent to what they might be saying. Gradually, however, as I recovered possession of myself, it occurred to me to listen and to surprise, if possible, some indication of Impéria’s feelings with respect to me. So from time to time I simulated profound sleep which no noise could possibly disturb, and I strained my ears so as not to lose a word, while imparting to my countenance the immobility of a man who hears absolutely nothing. I was an excellent actor in that direction.

The only interesting dialogue which I overheard was between Impéria and Bellamare. It was decisive, as you will see.

“Does he sleep as well as ever?”

“Yes.”

“And you are no longer tired?”

## A ROLLING STONE

"Not at all."

"Do you know, he is handsomer than ever with his pallor and that black beard?"

"Yes, he reminds me of Delacroix's Hamlet."

"Look you, my child! it's a most surprising thing to me that you have not fallen in love, in dead earnest, with such a handsome, first-rate fellow as he is!"

"What do you expect? I don't care for handsome fellows."

"Because they are fools. But this one is intelligent."

"To be sure, and I love him *morally*, with all my heart!"

"*Morally!* That's an exceedingly equivocal expression in your mouth, Mademoiselle de Valclos!"

"Don't try to find any hidden meaning in it, Monsieur Bellamare. I am twenty-three years old, and I see all that the stage reveals more ingenuously than society. So I have no reason to feign ignorance with you. I know that love is a fever which is kindled by a certain kind of glance; I know that ugly women inspire passions, and that beautiful women may experience them when they are not in love with themselves exclusively. All this does not mean that I have ever felt the slightest flutter at my heart in the presence of Laurence or of Léon, who is also very handsome and entirely without conceit. Why? It is impossible for me to say. I am inclined to believe that my eyes are not artistic and do not feel the influence of physical beauty."

"That is strange! Is your favored suitor ugly?"

"He is supposed to be."

"Oho I—It's a long while since I have had a moment to talk sense with you, my dear child. Tell me, does this favorite of yours really exist?"

"Don't you believe in him?"

"I have never believed in him."

"And you have been quite right," replied Impéria, stifling a strange little laugh.

"Why did you invent that fable?"

"So that I might be let alone."

"Then you must have distrusted me too, as you never confided your stratagem to me?"

"I have never distrusted you, my friend, never!"

"And you are determined not to love?"

"Firmly determined."

"Do you think it possible to avoid it?"

"It has been possible thus far."

"Suppose Laurence loves you?"

"Do you think it?"

"I do think it. He probably left us because he was mortified by your indifference."

"I trust that you are mistaken. I am very fond of him, but I do not love him, my friend, and it isn't my fault."

## A ROLLING STONE

"I told you without going into any particulars, that he is loved by someone of high rank."

"You did tell me that. But it aroused in me no desire to attract him. I am not a flirt."

"You are perfect, I know, and I am not one of the men who will tell you that a woman who does not love is a monster. I have known so many monsters in love, of both sexes, and I have dreamed so many foolish dreams which I thought sublime, in my own youth—"

"That now you believe in nothing?"

"In nothing but virtue, for I have fallen in with it two or three times in my life, gliding tranquil and goddess-like over the filthy pavement of earthly hells, without even a splash on its robe, which went its way, white and lustrous, amid all sorts of uncleanness. You are one of those unreal creatures before whom I bow to the earth, Mademoiselle de Valclos! You are so beautiful in my eyes that I shall be very careful to avoid dissecting the fibres of such an ideal being! I consider that men are insane to demand purity in women as a condition of loving them seriously, and then to seek at once to destroy that purity for their own benefit. They have naught but contempt for the weak, naught but frantic anger for the strong. What do they want, in heaven's name? For my part, I am all indulgence and forgiveness for the weak, all respect and adoration for the strong—Whereupon, my dear girl, I am going to bolt my dinner. What do you want me to send you for yours?"

"Tell the man at the restaurant to send me whatever he chooses."

"He will send you veal!"

"Very well."

"Veal! Pah! veal is vile stuff; there's no nourishment in it. What do you say to a mutton cutlet?"

"As you please, my dear friend; I am no gourmand."

"Entirely indifferent to sensual things, I know."

"Stay; I love potatoes."

"I will send you some potatoes."

"And above all some nice soup for my patient; but tell me, my dearest manager, have you any money?"

"Not a sou to-day, my dear; but that makes no difference; the *manezeringue* knows me, and I shall have some to-morrow."

"But you are going to the Vaudeville to-night, aren't you?"

"Well, haven't I my *entrée* there?"

"It is beastly weather; take enough to pay for a seat in the omnibus."

"So you have money, have you?"

"Twelve sous."

"The devil!"

"Come, take them!"

"Rather death!" he cried in a tragi-comic tone which made Impéria laugh even after he had gone.

This mixture of serious and trivial matters, this sudden transition

from lofty reflections to the vulgar realities of daily life, from Bellamare's profound, sincere and boundless respect for Mademoiselle de Valclos to his paternal familiarity with the *ingénue* of his company, will show you, I think, in its true light, the working of the intelligent actor's mind. I was more impressed by it that day than I had ever been; I had just heard the absolute, irrevocable truth in all its sincerity, and you will be surprised to learn that I was not painfully affected by it. A convalescent does not have very vivid impressions; it is as if he had but one object, to live at any price; moreover, I had renounced Impéria in all sincerity when I offered my heart to the countess. I should have despised myself, if by the slightest irresolution I had justified my unknown friend's insulting suspicions. Even after the tacit rupture which those suspicions had caused between her and myself, I should have considered it indelicate to return to my first love. So I vowed inwardly that I would henceforth be to Impéria only what she wished me to be, her brother and her friend. I gave to the sentiment she aroused in me the names of affection and gratitude. At twenty years one accepts boldly and in good faith these impossible compromises; he believes himself to be so strong! his pride is so guileless!

When I was able to sit up, Impéria left me; the next day, which I passed in an easy-chair by a pleasant little fire, she came again, and sat with me all the afternoon without removing her hat and cloak. I was strong enough to talk without fatigue, and I was very anxious to know about Bellamare's financial condition. What I had overheard led me to think, and with reason, that it was not brilliant. I asked if he had had a successful tour in Holland and Belgium.

"No," said Impéria, "far from it; our tour was quite profitable while you were with us; but, as soon as Bellamare has a little profit in hand, the passion for improving his company takes possession of him. You know that he always dreams of forwarding art while plying his trade, and then he is so generous! So he instantly raised all our salaries and engaged Mercoeur, who is inferior to Lambesq, but is paid more because he has a family. And so with Camille, who is not so good an actress as Lucinde, but has only her acting to live on. The receipts fell off, and living is dear in the North. In vain did Léon, Anna and I, without Bellamare's knowledge, replace in Moranbois's strong-box the surplus wages we had been forced to accept. When the season closed, he met all his obligations, as he always does; but we arrived here with nothing at all, and if I had not had a large stock of lace to sell, also without Bellamare's knowledge, for he never knows the exact state of Moranbois's accounts, I don't know how we should have lived. Now we are sure of being able to pay for our rooms and our meals. Léon has been to see his friend at Blois, whom you know, I believe, and he has lent us a certain sum which Bellamare has agreed to accept. He always accepts a loan because he always finds a way to repay it; and when he has paid it he begins again with nothing; this has been going on so long that his serenity is never impaired by it, and we

have become accustomed to sharing his confidence."

I made up my mind to put one of my thousand franc notes into the treasury, and I continued my questions. Bellamare had grand projects for the summer; he intended to leave France, where we had too many competitors, and he said that, as French was the universal language, if good actors starved to death at home it was simply because they hadn't the courage to travel. That evening it was Moranbois's turn to sit with me. I attempted to hand him my contribution, but he declined it. They could afford to incur a small debt to Léon, he said, as he would inherit a handsome fortune some day and was a beggar only because he chose to be; but he, Moranbois, knew that I was in no position to support Bellamare's enterprise with my money. Bellamare was always satisfied when he could make both ends meet at the end of the year, and in Moranbois's judgment Bellamare was right.

"So long as a man makes a living by honest work," he said, "what does it matter that he doesn't save? The best and wisest men are the ones who succeed in keeping themselves just above want. They don't have the anxiety of owning property, keeping it in repair, investing and reinvesting. Responsibility to other people is quite enough to keep an honest man busy, without his adding to it the foolish responsibility to himself which is called a prudent spirit, and which makes men in the prime of life grow old all of a sudden—It's the constant fretting to feather their nests," said Moranbois in his figurative language, "that makes their bellies shrink and their teeth decay. The master"—that was what he called Bellamare—"will always be young because he'll never be a curnudgeon to himself or other people. He won't spend his strength building a palace to lodge the dried apple he will be twenty-five or thirty years hence. I hear everybody talk about laying something by for their old age, as if they were sure of having any old age, and as if they ought to want it! What a bright idea it is to drink your blood as long as you have any, in order to have something to live on when you're nothing more than a handful of dust fit for the ash-heap! They say to those who are heedless of the future: 'Do you propose to ask alms when you are not able to work?'—For my part, my answer is that the peasants plough the earth till the day they're put underneath it, and that a man's just as thoroughly buried whether he has a sheet of fine linen or a dish-clout for his shroud."

Notwithstanding the fact that I agreed with this exalted philosophy, I insisted upon being allowed to make it easier for Bellamare and his friend to employ and utilize to their own satisfaction their artistic careers.

"We have a thousand francs from Léon," said Moranbois; "that is enough to keep us afloat. I can run the master in debt without his knowledge, but it would not be doing him a service. If you want to be of use to him, come and travel with us as a partner."

Thereupon he explained that Bellamare, Léon, Impéria, Anna,



Marco and himself had determined that all the receipts should go into the common purse, and that, after the salaries of the other members of the company and all the expenses had been paid, the remaining profit, if any, should be equally divided between them.

"There won't be any profit," he said; "but we shall have lived, worked, eaten and travelled for a year without being a burden to anyone. Think it over and see if you care to join in the game. You need to stir up your saucepan and put out your fire, so the doctors say. You can't travel alone, for it costs too much and is too dismal; with us you will be in good spirits all the time, and the receipts will meet the expenses."

"I would accept gladly enough," I said, "if I had talent enough to contribute materially to the receipts; but I have none at all, and I should simply be an additional burden."

"You are mistaken; talent or not, you attract the fair sex, and you will fill the proscenium boxes for us. Léon is worse than you in love-making scenes, and he's the only one the public want to see in melodrama. We haven't filled your place for lack of the *needful* to engage a lover; you were very useful to us, as we found out after you left; the receipts fell off."

I confessed to Moranbois that such an exhibition of my physical qualities was most humiliating to me. In order to obtain forgiveness for posing as a model before the public, one must be able to speak to its intelligence as well as to its eyes. Moranbois, shrewd and keen as he was, did not understand my scruples and laughed at them. He thought that, when a man is handsome and well-made, there is no immodesty in showing himself. I saw the mountebank crop out in him, the street-corner Hercules, exhibiting his trunk and his biceps with intense satisfaction.

I consulted Impéria touching Moranbois's suggestion. Her first impulse was to welcome the idea with affectionate and sincere delight; then I saw that she became anxious and irresolute. I guessed that Bellamare's conjectures had come to her mind, and that she dreaded seeming to encourage my love. I reassured her by informing her that I was engaged to a girl in my province, but that I was too young to think of marriage, and was free to travel about the world as I chose, during one season at least. I thought that I might justifiably tell her the lie she had told me, and as she had imagined a love-affair to protect herself from my aspirations, so I imagined one to protect myself from her distrust.

Thereupon she insisted on my joining them, and the doctor who had attended me coincided with her. If I went back to my office within six months I was a dead man. I wrote my father to that effect, and he approved my determination by the hand of the school teacher, his secretary. Moranbois and Bellamare welcomed me with transports of joy. Bellamare drew up a document in a beautiful hand, setting forth our agreement as partners, and we insisted on the addition of a clause

providing that he should retain the absolute authority of a manager over the members of his company. We did not propose that any one of our number, on a day of nervous excitement or misanthropical exhaustion, should have it in his power to interfere by tedious arguments with the unfettered exercise of so active and so intelligent a management as his.

Anna courageously left her lover, who abused her, but whom she bewailed none the less. That girl, who was always unreasonable and unhappy in love, was the most estimable and reliable of women in friendship. She was incapable of spite or hard feeling; indeed she was grateful to me for not having taken advantage of a slight penchant she had had for me in the early days of our tour. She was delighted, therefore, to have me for a partner in the new campaign. Léon, returning from Blois, and Marco from Rouen, greeted me with equal warmth, and declared that I was a true artist. We started for Italy in the latter part of August, without waiting for the Odéon to close, and without Régine, who was to join us as soon as she was free. We had to engage on the road a *grande coquette* and some sort of a Frederick Lemaître. Lambesq happened to fall in Bellamare's way. He had had bad luck and was more tractable than formerly. Trying to the temper as he was, we had owed more than one success to him, and we were glad to take him back. Impéria was in favor of doing it, saying that we were used to his faults, and that we should not easily find his good qualities elsewhere.

We were on the point of making a contract with a Mademoiselle Arsène, who had played the confidential maids at the Théâtre-Français, and consequently thought that she could take Rachel's parts in the provinces. We were not so sure of it as she was, and we were still hesitating, when Lucinde wrote us that she had always wanted to see Italy and that she would be satisfied with the salary she formerly had with us. She had been unable to make her wine-merchant promise to marry her, and although he continued to provide handsomely for her, he bored her to death. Perhaps she hoped to rekindle his passion by leaving him alone and pretending to prefer the stage to him. We waited for her and crossed the frontier with her. The company was full, and, all business arrangements being completed, we were very glad to see one another. On the way we gave more than one play which contained more characters than there were persons in the company. At that period, which was a very perturbed period in France, many actors out of employment were seeking fortune on the high roads, and we were able to enlist one or more temporarily. These wandering artists were sometimes of very interesting types, particularly those who had remained honest amid the most extraordinary vicissitudes. If I say nothing of those whom want had corrupted or whom it had plunged inevitably and hopelessly into indolence and vice, it is because those types resemble one another so closely that there is no interest in observing and describing them. Those, on the

other hand, who would die of hunger rather than debase themselves deserve to be commemorated by biographies written by men of intellect. They form the interesting and respectable cohort of "cranks," whom the world, the practical world, does not pity or assist, because their ill luck is due to lack of practical sense, and may be pitilessly imputed to their improvidence and unselfishness. I confess that I felt more than once a very warm sympathy for those honest adventurers, and that, if I had not considered my little capital consecrated to the emergencies which possibly awaited my own comrades, I should have spent it in small change on those chance acquaintances. I will mention one instance out of many to give you an idea of the destiny of some men.

His name was Fontanet—*de* Fontanet, for he was of gentle birth and neither paraded nor concealed his particle. He had once possessed five hundred thousand francs, and during his innocent and orderly youth he had lived on his estates in the country, devoted to the collection of works treating of the stage. Why that mania rather than another? In the matter of manias one should never be astonished at anything; if one could go back to the mysterious spring whence the innumerable fancies of the human brain trickle forth, one would find chances necessarily coinciding with aptitudes.

The result was that Fontanet found himself ruined one fine morning in 1849 by a friend just started in business, whom he had allowed to raise fifty thousand francs by a mortgage on his property. It was then a favorite form of speculation to borrow a small sum of money on valuable real estate, to omit to repay it, to force a sale by underhand means, and to buy it in at a low price, still keeping under cover. Many lives have been wrecked in this way to secretly enrich shrewd and farseeing capitalists.

Fontanet, being victimized by this amiable operation, considered it a waste of time to complain, and, having an idea that his familiarity with the archaeological lore of the theatre made him a fit subject for the stage, he turned actor. Nature had denied him everything except intelligence: he had neither voice, nor physique, nor enunciation, nor ease of manner, nor memory, nor presence of mind. He was not successful, which fact did not prevent his finding his new profession very amusing, nor interfere with his collecting for others books and engravings which he was no longer able to purchase on his own account. Having obtained a subordinate position in the theatre at Lyon, he looked about for a lodging, and found a sort of shop which he could hire at a very low figure because it was so small that no tradesman would hire it. He set up his miserable pallet there; but the next day he said to himself that, as he had a shop, he ought to sell something, and he purchased for twenty francs a stock of children's toys, tops, balls, skipping-ropes and hoops. At the same time he set about making little wooden spades and wheelbarrows with his own hands. His business was quite successful, and might have been even more so; but

the company to which he belonged left Lyon, and he could not make up his mind to give up the stage. He sold his stock to a Jew, who knew his mania and gave him in exchange a supposititious portrait of an ancient actor, it was a small bronze figure cleverly embellished with a lying inscription. Fontanet thought that he had got hold of a treasure and tried to sell it. He was offered a thousand francs but could not make up his mind to part with it; and on the day that he discovered the fraud he consoled himself by saying:

“How lucky it was that I didn’t sell it for a thousand francs! how I should have deceived the man who bought it!”

In a town in Piedmont he fell in with a pious lady, who asked him to direct her to a good painter. She wished to adorn her private chapel with a picture two metres in height and one in width, representing her patron saint, and she offered a hundred francs for the job. Fontanet offered to paint the picture himself. He had never touched a brush nor drawn a figure in his life. He set about it resolutely, copied as best he could some saint or other from the first fresco that came to hand, and proudly signed his work: *De Fontanet, painter of religious subjects*. He obtained other orders, painted divers gaudy signs, and was beginning to earn his living, when chance led him to some other place where a mania for ceramic art took possession of him and led him to perpetrate a number of Etruscan vases, which he sold to English people, but at so low a price that they really were not robbed and were overjoyed at the thought that they were overreaching the ignorant vendor.

The money that Fontanet had received for his pictures he lent to the manager of a travelling company, who did not return it; what he had received for his vases, he gave to a poor beggar woman to bring up a child whose figure he had used as a model, and whom he had put to school. So it was that, after trying his hand at a hundred petty trades and professions, having kept nothing for himself, and unable to make up his mind to leave the stage, which was the most disastrous of all his occupations, in that it made it impossible for him to settle anywhere and brought him constantly in contact with sharpers or needy folk who stripped him, he offered his services to us at Florence to take the *financiers’* parts. He had succeeded in acquiring a certain degree of talent. He was a useful man to us, and he was so amiable, so good-humored, so original and so likable, that we were very sorry indeed when we were forced to part with him.

I will not describe my travels in detail; it would take three days, and my adventures, which would do very well to fill the gaps in a desultory conversation, would simply postpone that in which you are interested, the history of my feelings and my thoughts.

So I will take you rapidly by Turin, Florence and Trieste, and through Austria and Switzerland to Geneva, where we made up our accounts after several very successful performances. We had had a good time, as Moranbois said, and we had just seventy-francs net

profit to divide between seven partners; but we had had an interesting and almost luxurious tour, the other members of the company were paid, and Léon's friend reimbursed. Lucinde, Lambesq and Régine left us. It was my vacation season and my father expected me. The other partners proposed to try their luck farther, they did not know where. I promised to join them at the end of the winter, which I intended to pass in Paris; and Moranbois finally consented to borrow my thousand francs, as the money was needed to put my manager and my comrades in condition to reorganize.

Returning to my little town, among the paternal radishes and asparagus, I had leisure to reflect upon my position and prospects, and I will try to recall my reflections for your benefit.

I had made some progress on the stage. I had acquired an excellent manner, free from any appearance of embarrassment, although I still was embarrassed. I had mustered enough self-possession to avoid making, from excess of emotion, blunders which my intelligence abhorred. I still pleased the women, and no longer displeased the men. I had become resigned to the necessity of being always costumed as a man of fashion. I had been humiliated at first by that necessity, saying that I did not choose to owe my success to the tailor. I saw that the audience thought more of my waistcoats than of my delivery, and held in esteem a man so well dressed. My comrades, in a facetious moment, had amused themselves by representing me as the scion of a noble family, and they thereby relieved me from the necessity of being a good actor, so long as I seemed to be a man of fashion.

"Don't turn up your nose at that," said Bellamare; "you are our sign, your nobility bears fruit, and at each new halting-place, the imagination of the fools enriches our troupe with one hidalgo more. At Venice I was *il Signor de Bellamare*, manager of a whole company of titled players, and I had but to say a word to make you a duke and myself a marquis. The prestige of noble birth is still potent in foreign countries. In France it is most amusingly blended with democratic vanity, and if you were enough of an adventurer to put a *de* before your name, the people in the small towns would be proud to have a great nobleman act for them. So don't deny that you are one, and don't take it all too seriously; we are travelling for our pleasure. Be assured that it will not detract at all from the talent which you should have, and which you will have in time, I give you my word."

He tried to give me talent, and he succeeded while I was reciting my rôles to him. We declaimed Corneille as we crossed the Alps on donkeys. The glaciers of Switzerland, the shores of the Mediterranean, ruined castles, grottoes, all the picturesque solitudes we explored together, rang with the echoes of our voices keyed up to the pitch of dramatic passion. I felt that I had power, I believed that I was inspired. Before the footlights it all disappeared. I was too conscientious, I judged myself too severely. I was my own critic and the worst obstacle in my own path.

So much for my talent; as for my love, it had assumed a new aspect. Mademoiselle de Valclos's equanimity and serenity of character, which had not wavered a single instant during all the trials, vexations, fatigues and accidents inseparable from long journeys, had insensibly inoculated me with that calm and affectionate respect which they inspired in Bellamare, without arousing in him the slightest suspicion of sensuality. Bellamare, however, while in no sense a libertine, was ardent in the pursuit of pleasure. He knew no middle ground between desire without affection and affection without desire. He was still capable of doing foolish things for a woman he desired; when his desire was satisfied, he ceased to make a fool of himself and parted from her, on pleasant terms but without regret. That man, with his happy disposition and his winning kindness, exerted a powerful influence over me. I was anxious to acquire sentiments and views like his. I strove to imitate him in his mistakes and in his wisdom; but whereas his faculties reappeared, tranquillized and refreshed, after the *exfogation* (I have retained this word in Laurence's narrative, because it impressed me. I do not think that it is French, but I wish that it were. Doubtless it was a reminiscence of Italy on my narrator's part, for they have there the verb *sfogarsi*, a wonderfully expressive word which has no equivalent in our language) of his instincts, I found only self-contempt and profound sadness. I was an idealist, and moreover I was only half as old as he. It was absurd of me to believe that a man can arrange his life like another man's. Reason does not fit itself to us like a borrowed garment; everyone of us must be able to cut his own to fit his own shape.

This infatuation for Bellamare and this chimera of desiring to resemble him succeeded at all events in deadening my passion. Perhaps the sudden and violent invasion of another love, the dream of the unknown, had effaced Impéria's image to some extent. Certain it is that she no longer frightened me, and that a deep-rooted affection allayed the secret transports of my desire. Seeing how she was respected by my other comrades, I should have deemed myself a conceited fool to think of conquering her. By dint of not thinking of it, I ceased even to desire it.

At all events I was in that frame of mind when I left her at Geneva. When I was once more at home, I thought of her without agitation; but it soon became impossible for me to shut my eyes to the fact that she was necessary to my intellectual life, and that I should have a terribly tedious time of it where she was not. I had not the courage to resume my serious studies. Music and drawing suited me better, because they allowed me to think of her. She had a charming little thread of a voice, was an excellent musician, and sang very sweetly. In striving to become a good musician myself, I thought only of singing with her or accompanying her. She had given me lessons from time to time during our tour, and it is a fact that they were the best lessons I ever received.

I deceived myself for some time by thinking that the company of Bellamare, Léon, Anna and Marco was as necessary to me as Impéria's. They were so fond of me! they were so agreeable and interesting! How could the environment to which I had returned fail to seem intolerable to me? In vain did I reproach myself for this separation between my former friends and myself. It seemed to me that it was most reprehensible to sigh for Bellamare's conversation when I was with my father; but was it not he, my poor father, who, by casting me adrift in civilization, had forced me to break with uncivilized life?

However, when I dealt sincerely with myself, I realized that I could readily have forgotten Bellamare and all my comrades except Impéria. It was not my father's fault that I had foolishly become attached to a woman who refused to love anyone!

One day, while I was crossing the Alps in a sleigh with Bellamare, he had asked me the result of my affair with the countess. Thereupon I told him the whole truth, or nearly the whole. At that moment I was fully persuaded that I no longer loved Impéria, that I should never love her again, and that Bellamare might repeat my confidences to her without injuring me. Moreover, in my revelations I moderated very materially the ardor of my first passion, and I did not mention its beginning. I did not boast of having embraced the theatrical career because of her; I simply confessed that at the time of the Blois episode I was more in love with her than with the unknown. In everything else I could be perfectly sincere.

Bellamare's opinion concerning the situation made a deep impression upon me. In the first place, he approved my conduct; then he continued:

"You have unconsciously taken the best course to be loved in good earnest by this countess—sincerity first, then pride. When she allowed you to see her suspicions, she expected a sharp rejoinder, a struggle in which she would not have admitted defeat until she had rolled you about to her heart's content in the dust of the arena. Then she would have ceased to love you. Women are made so. You do them a service by refusing to yield to their instinct for fighting, by training them to love frankly, as they can do so well when they are not led astray in quest of the impossible. Love is a beautiful, yes, a sublime thing with them at the outset. Beware of the second and third acts of the drama! When you cannot rush the dénouement, you must wait for it. So wait silently, let the fire smoulder, and you will see that she will come again, loyal and strong, as she was that night in the blue chamber. If she comes, accept my congratulations. If she doesn't come, rejoice that you have escaped a mere passion of the head. That is the worst sort."

And he added:

"If Impéria had not made up her mind to a certain course, I would have blessed your love. I consider you worthy of each other;

but she is prudent and will not have a lover. Moreover, she is reasonable, and will not plunge into marriage and poverty. Lastly, she is happy in her virtue, and I believe in that, although I don't understand it. So don't think any more about it, if you are reasonable yourself. Do you imagine that, on the day she first came to me—mysteriously, like the countess, but with much more serious and well-defined ideas—to tell me of her family misfortunes, and to ask me to help her and give her employment, I was not as much moved—perhaps more so—than you were in the blue chamber? She was so pretty in her grief, so fascinating in her trustfulness! I had the vertigo ten times in that two hours' interview, tête-à-tête with her; but if Bellamare has a nose to scent opportunity and claws to seize it by the hair, he has an eye for true virtue and a hand which cleanses itself by conferring blessings. When I left her I had promised to be a father to her, and to every reservation that my evil genius suggested I answered uncompromisingly: 'Never! never! never!' Now, when things present themselves so clearly to my conscience, I am not entitled to the least credit, because there is no battle to be fought; and I confess that I cannot understand why it should be harder for a man of honor to keep from playing a woman false than to keep from cheating at play."

At that moment Bellamare's reasoning seemed unanswerable to me. I thought it over all through my vacation, and I could find no answer to it; but it did not prevent my being sadly cast down and very unhappy. I tried to rekindle my flame for the countess, and I often dreamed of the joys of mutual love; but when I woke, I no longer loved her. Her image appealed only to my senses through the imagination.

At the end of the vacation, I asked myself if I should not abandon the law, which seemed unlikely to lead me to anything, and join Bellamare's company. I would not make up my mind without consulting my father. I thought that he would oppose my doing it, but such a thing never occurred to him. At first I had much difficulty in making him understand what the stage was. No theatrical company had ever come to our town, there was no place for them to perform. What my father called *comedians* were the dealers in Swiss tea, bear-leaders and Merry-Andrews whom he had seen at the fairs and fêtes. So I was very careful not to pronounce the words comedy or comedians, which would have aroused only profound contempt in his mind. Despite my determination to be perfectly sincere, I gave him explanations which, while literally true, presented only a vague and somewhat unreal meaning to his mind. My father has never lost the elementary simplicity of the man whose whole life is given to manual labor, as to a duty, as to a religion from which no thought foreign to that labor can divert him without making him unfit for it. My mother, who was very bright, used to laugh at him a little for his credulity and good humor. He made no objection and was quite willing to laugh with her;



they adored each other, none the less; but he would not have permitted me to notice his inferiority with respect to me. He wanted me to be *different* from him, not *superior* to him; he considered his own trade different from mine, but equal to it in dignity. His worship for the soil made it impossible for him to think otherwise, and in reality he was absolutely right, according to the most exalted philosophy, although he did not suspect it. He had the humblest respect for learning, but coupled with the condition that the cultivation of the soil should be held in no less respect. His reason for bringing me up to something different was that he thought that, by making me a peasant, he would disqualify me for the problematical inheritance of my uncle the parvenu.

When I told him that I wished to associate myself with persons who spoke in public, in order to practise the art of saying noble things well, he was satisfied and asked me nothing farther. He would have been afraid that his questions would show how little idea he really had of the nature of that employment. So I went away, taking with me his blessing, as always, and my small capital, which I had carried constantly in my belt for a year past, in order to be prepared for emergencies. It was not bulky enough to embarrass me, especially as I had already reduced it by one half.

At the beginning of the winter I rejoined the troupe at Toulon, and was enthusiastically received. The condition of affairs was not promising; they had continued to have a good time, as Moranbois said, and they were holding a council to decide whether they should continue their exploration of the Mediterranean shore.

At that time, the coast towns had scarcely begun to enjoy the vogue which they have attained since. There were no railroads as yet, no lighting by gas, no gambling houses. Europe had not laid siege to that narrow cliff which stretches, like an *espalier* in the sunlight, from Toulon to Monaco, and will soon be extended to Genoa.

"My children," said Bellamare, "we shall continue just to keep body and soul together forever, if we do not make a bold stroke. I have never made any money except outside of France; no man is a prophet in his own country. I have been pretty nearly round the world, and I know that the farther away you go, the more people you attract. Remember that we succeeded better last year at Trieste, the farthest point of our tour, than we did anywhere else. I wanted to push on to Odessa across the plains of the Danube. I remembered that I had done well there; we would have returned by way of Moscow. You recoiled from the Russian campaign. If you will take my advice, we will undertake it now; but as winter is approaching, we will start with the warm provinces. We will go to Constantinople and stay there two months; we will go from Temesvar to Bucharest, which is also a good city for us; as soon as the weather permits we will cross the Balkans, go on to Jassy and reach Odessa with the swallows."

We called his attention to the fact that the expenses of the tour

would be heavy. He showed us letters from a promoter who would undertake to pay the expense of transportation, and would also look after our return if we could make enough to reimburse him. He was a former partner of Bellamare's, upon whom he thought that he could rely. We took a vote. Everyone of us pitched up a coin to see how he should vote. Chance cast a majority for the tour. I confess that, when I found that Impéria wished to go, I cheated in order to cast the weight into the affirmative scale.

Once more I propose to pass over a mass of details, tedious or amusing, which have no relation to my main theme. I will simply say that while the majority were brave and full of hope, the minority, consisting of Lucinde, Lambesq, Régine and Purpurin, were only half pleased or not at all. The last-named could never forgive foreigners for knowing French better than he did, and Lambesq, who claimed that he could talk Italian, was furious because he was understood with less difficulty in Italy when he spoke his own language. His nature, like Léon's, was soured by disappointments; but he had not, as Léon had, the good sense to conceal his hurts. He believed that he was the only great genius on earth and the only unappreciated one. According to him, artists who were favorites of the public and smiled upon by success owed their good fortune to intrigue and to that alone.

Régine laughed at everything; no one was more inured to the hardships of a wandering life; but she augured ill for our financial success, and said again and again that it was easy to go a long distance, the more difficult thing would be to return. Lucinde had no fears on her own account. She was not the woman to embark empty-handed; but she was afraid that she would be compelled to pay the expenses of our home-coming, and she did not conceal her anxiety.

Strangely enough, Moranbois, the most stoical and self-contained of us all, was not free from uneasiness. He did not know Zamorini, the promoter in whose hands Bellamare had placed himself; but he had had a bad dream about him; he said, and that man of stone and iron, who feared no danger and knew no hesitation, was superstitious—he believed in dreams.